



CYNTHIA'S
BROTHER

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'If you had stayed away fifty years I must have waited still.' [page 234.]

Cynthia's Brother

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CYNTHIA'S BROTHER

CHAPTER I



IT would have been a very lonely world for Cynthia to enter if Francie had not been there before her, a three-year-old inhabitant, with two nurseries, a kitchen garden, and a vast prairie of fields for his kingdom, 'nursie' his particular slave, and all the toys and nonsense rhymes and fairy tales for his peculiar pleasure. This comfortable state of things lasted until the day when nursie, who had left a very cross little boy to the care of Jane, the under-girl, returned with a bundle of flannel held carefully in her arms.

Jane flew to place a low chair in front of the high tender, and nursie sat down very slowly, with the stiff dignity of middle age and rheumatism, and unfolded a corner of the embroidered square in which her burden was swathed. As she looked down with love and pity and infinite concern in her lined old face, two bright dark eyes seemed to meet

her gaze as if confident of shelter within the circle of those strong, supporting arms.

'Bless it, dear lamb! It seems to be taking notice already!' she cried.

Francie, who had been playing offendedly in the corner, ran across the room at these words, and launched himself upon Nurse Bruce, who yielded like a well-filled feather-bed to the impact. That she should address anything or anybody but himself as 'dear lamb' was a puzzle and an injury to Francie's small soul. He pushed and struggled against Jane's restraining hand.

'What you got there, nursie?' he demanded.

'Is it a pussy-kitty? Francie wants to see.'

'You shall see, my pretty, that you shall!' said nursie, in her husky, comfortable voice. 'This is your little new sister, Master Francie, that has come to stay with you and play with you.'

Francie stared in uncomprehending wonder at the small, puckered face, the little mouth that kept working, the dark eyes that gazed so steadily at the light let in between the flannel folds. He put out a sudden finger to poke at these, mindful of a doll in his possession whose glass orbs, triumphantly dislodged from their sockets, you could hear rattling inside an empty brain if you shook hard enough.

'Who broughted it?' he demanded. 'Was there lots and lots of paper with string for Francie's kite?'

'Just fancy!' said Jane, with a smothered snigger.

Nursie looked up with rebuke, while she captured the little hand and kissed it.

'God sent her, dearie. He wanted your dear mamma to be with Himself in heaven, so He sent the little girl that the world might be less lonely for you and your poor papa. And you'll love her dearly, Master Francie, for, poor innocent,'—nursie smothered a sigh and spoke half to herself,—'her little life has been bought at a great cost.'

To Francie, whose immature mind reflected nursie's simple creed, the words 'God' and 'heaven' conveyed nothing but a larger love, a happier home, towards which he was taught in his nightly prayer to aspire: 'God bless Francie, and make him a good boy, and take him to heaven when he dies.' That mamma should have gone there before him, alas, carried no poignant grief to his baby heart, since for many months of Francie's short life his mother had been ill, often too ill to see her little son at any part of her long day of pain. At other times, when she had an easier hour, and Nurse Bruce would carry him along the great corridor behind the baize door, it was to a room darkened from the outer sunlight with drawn blinds, that made a mysterious, dim twilight, where someone, who stood at the door with finger on lip, always said 'Hush!' as if mamma was asleep, though she looked at Sonnie with wide-open eyes, and put a hand on his yellow curls, and said little words of love in a low, whispering voice. The

last time of all it had been papa who had come to the nursery to fetch him, and he had cried and struggled, and kicked with his bare, rosy feet, newly taken out of his crib as he was. So nursie, holding him against her broad bosom, with a fold of her little red shawl round him, had to go too, and she was crying all the way; he could feel her tears upon the cheek that he had not hidden in her neck; and when he lifted his head in surprise at this strange thing, his thoughts were immediately diverted by the lights that were shining all round the usually dark room, so that he turned his eyes about to follow them, till they reached the bed where mamma lay, with a smile on her lips for Sonnie, though they were so cold, so cold, when nursie whispered to him to stoop down and kiss her on them. Then, when, being frightened, he began to cry again, papa said, in a voice that Francie, baby as he was, never forgot, because, as he knew long afterwards, of the heartbreak in it—

‘Take him away. Go, all of you, and leave us alone together.’ And between that disturbing dream and this morning’s mystery there seemed to be a long league of space, though in reality it was but one spring night of a child’s sound sleep.

‘Is Master Francie to put on his blacks to-day?’ Jane asked in a loud, solemn whisper. ‘Cook was saying as how we’d best try on our parrymattys, so’s to be ready against the funeral.’

'Sh!' said Nurse Bruce sharply, frowning at that word. 'Cook had a deal better be thinking of her own end; there's never any telling who'll be took next, and it's an awful thing to be called away unready, Jane. It would be a blessed thing if we was all as prepared for heaven as my dear lady.'

'It's only that Miss Wilson is such a bad hand at the fittin', said Jane, showing an inclination to sniff. 'I'm sure, Mrs. Bruce, I was meaning no disrespect, and I've never shut an eye, what with cryin' all night; but if it *is* blacks, you needn't look like a clothes-pole. And if Sir James should send for Master Francie'—

'Time enough when the master does send for him,' said nurse, her voice softening as her eyes rested on the yellow-haired child at her side; 'he'll leave all his life to know his loss in, poor lamb.'

So Francie continued to wear the old blue velvet frock which was past taking any harm from the rocking-horse, and was dotted all over with little marks from the cane-seated chair which Joel, the odd man, had made for him, and only officially appeared his mother upon the rare occasions when old Lady Considine remembered that father and son ought sometimes to meet, and sent for Francie to be present at dessert.

In spite of the almonds and raisins held out by way of reward, Francie looked upon these expeditions as enforced travel in a foreign land, and never

let Jane wash his face for the journey without a protest. Home for him lay behind the baize door, and there, by the sweet usage of daily speech, he was taught to think of his pretty mamma as an angel who was waiting in heaven till Francie should be good enough to go to her.

His new companion was not christened Margaret, after her mother, but Cynthia, which was a Considine name, and had last belonged to a deceased grand-aunt. Unlike the great majority of such small and tender people, she was never addressed as Baby, or by any pet diminutive, but from the first was given her full honours, like a grown-up person, perhaps that others, and her father in especial, might not always bear in remembrance the sad circumstances of her birth. And it may be, since our names do count for something in the shaping of our destiny, that Cynthia's helped to encourage a certain steady old-fashionedness of character which made her entire devotion to Francie seem an odd thing, as if the elder were stooping to serve the younger.

'Tis the shadder on she, poor lil miss,' Mrs. Brand from the lodge would say, when she came to take tea with nurse. Mrs. Brand knew her manners better than to sit at a less distance than a yard from the table, but she spoke with her mouth full of the rich, crumbly dripping-cake, sent from the kitchen on the occasion of her visits, as if some indistinctness of utterance were appropriate to the

subject. 'Her baan't like to escape it, no way; her's got the look. 'Tis that makes her so meek-like with the lil bwoy. She'm a weak sapling, if you ax me; she'm not long for this world.'

Nurse Bruce was not perhaps without the superstitions of her class, but her sound common-sense in this instance triumphed over her fears.

'She's never ailed a day,' she replied, 'and cut every tooth in her blessed little head without your ever knowing it! The nights I've had with Master Francie, walking up and down and singing to him till I was ready to drop! But Miss Cynthia, she'll sleep as sound as a little top from the minute you lay her head on the pillow till she wakens with the birds in the morning!'

There was nothing, indeed, in the look of the brown, sturdy girlie, pounding the bread and milk in her porringer with a horn spoon, to justify any sentimental dread of an early doom; her chubby face was not pretty, except in the mirror of friendly eyes, but she was a comfortable, self-respecting baby, who brought herself up in the way she should go, with the least possible trouble to other people. Nurse, who had cradled and crooned over a dozen babies, with a new heart of love for each, went far nearer the truth when she said—

'There's some that's born to wait on others, just as they are born with black eyes or blue, and you can't change their nature no more than you can

change the colour of their skin. And there isn't much sense in wishing them different, for you've the Bible word for it they're the happiest.'

She was right, at least, in believing that the foundations of character are laid far earlier than we are apt to think; beginning, indeed, at the very bottom of the ocean of unconsciousness, and growing silently by infinite additions, by a myriad experiences and experiments and failures; her hand could but guide where the fabric was threatened, it could not fashion. She exhorted Francie, by every simple device of story and reminiscence and warning, to be chivalrous to his little sister; but though the selfish boy of fiction always came to a bad end, the moral never hindered Cynthia from eating Francie's crusts (since it was a nursery rule that crusts must be eaten), or from taking as her own portion the hard outside of the loaf, or the end of the dumpling where, by some mysterious law, there are never any currants.

Francie was a very handsome boy, with a straight, graceful figure, a head sunning over with yellow curls, and blue eyes that had an irresistible trick of pathos; he was used to words of praise and admiration, and these, perhaps, helped to strengthen his native imperiousness; Cynthia, on the other hand, was very early imbued with the idea that she was 'nothing to look at,' and must consequently be extra good. This was at least Grandmamma Considine's

view of the matter, and she was at no pains to conceal it when, with her portly rustle, she paid one of her rare visits to the nursery people. Grandmamma was herself an exceedingly handsome person, with blonde hair and an aquiline nose, and perhaps she could not help thinking that there must be some inherent depravity of nature in babies born with deep-set grey eyes, big mouths, and snub noses.

'Bless me! How like the child is to her great-uncle and namesake!' she said. 'Uncle Henry was the only Considine who displayed an utter lack of taste in choosing a wife, and here is one outcome of it! Really, a man might reflect what he is handing down. Well, my dear, you will certainly have to be good, for you will never be pretty.'

Cynthia was too busy conning over the crystal buttons that sparkled on grandmamma's chest—'soldier,' 'sailor,' 'tinker,' 'tailor,'—to pay much attention; but when grandmamma paused she had just got to 'pothecary,' and she said it aloud, to keep the place in mind.

'What, what!' said grandmamma sharply. 'Don't talk nonsense, child! I am telling you that you must be good.'

Cynthia lifted dark eyes to the light ones rather sternly meeting hers, and said clearly, for she had no more a baby language than a baby name—

'Yes, I will be good. I will always do what Francis wants.'

'She's good already,' said nursie, jealous to defend her charge; 'the forgivingest child that ever was, my lady; and Master Francie do tease her sometimes.'

'Well, well, that won't hurt her! She must have a new frock, Bruce, before her father sees her. I suppose, as she's five years old, she must come down to dessert now with her brother.'

It certainly mattered nothing at all to the little Cynthia whether she were pretty or ugly, so long as she had Francie to play with; even the promised new frock and the coveted permission to go down to dessert would have had no charm, but for the thought of descending the long staircase hand in hand with Francie, instead of wistfully watching his solitary progress from the top. The very few hours when Francie was not at her side were mournful epochs in the little maid's life; as a rule, she was as close to him as his shadow. The harmony of their play-hours was seldom disturbed, since in all their games she was humbly ready to take the unornamental part; to be the chased prey when Francie chose to turn hunter; the victim, even to the extent of subjecting herself to be stung with nettles and doctored with dock leaves, when he was inspired to personate Mr. Brown, the surgeon called in to prescribe for Jane's shingles. If she cried, it was not so much because the nettles hurt, as because she fell below Francie's standard in the matter of pain-bearing. 'It's only girls that make a fuss!'

he said scornfully—like older philosophers, able to endure other people's discomfort with equanimity. Nevertheless, Cynthia would have taken Francie's share of the measles as well as her own, if Nature had accommodated herself to that piece of altruism, and it is certain that she frequently made his path of repentance easy by doing his apologising for him.

For all her self-effacement, she was a healthy and happy child; the only two blots upon her blue, that she could not turn herself into a boy, and that she was not allowed to take Soot, the black kitten, to bed with her.

CHAPTER II



FORDEDGE was neither a very large nor a very remunerative property, having suffered curtailment since the rambling house that had sheltered so many generations of Considines was built, but it was situated in the loveliest county of Southern England, and the soft beauty of the Devon landscape—where the fields melt into woods, and the woods skirt the hem of the purple moor, and the air is like wine, and the moist odour of the rich, red earth seems to be a part of the lark's song: music, colour, scent so subtly blended that they touch but one emotional chord — had its unconscious influence on the children's lives.

If they were brought up in the strict fashion of Grandmamma Considine's youth, of which one ruling principle was that young people should be as nearly as possible invisible and inaudible, they led a wholesome enough existence under Nurse Bruce's liberal rule. Never too finely dressed to grub and mess about freely, they wandered un-

checked through the vast continent of the home fields, the shrubbery, and the kitchen garden. The front of the house was forbidden territory both to the children and to Augustus, the pink-nosed bull-pup, grandmamma having particular notions about gravel walks, and flower-beds, and smooth-shaven lawns; these things being chiefly meant to be looked at from easy-chairs through windows. But who wanted more than the liberty of the potato patch or the asparagus bed, where you could make believe an Indian jungle—Cynthia always ready to constitute herself a hunted tiger, though she did the digging so badly; or the potting-shed, where Peter, the under-gardener, let you whittle tallies and smear them with whitelead (almost as good as the treat of a knife to spread your own butter); or the turf-hole, surely designed specially for the building of wigwags, until the morning when Francie discovered that it was a fortress, and Cynthia, her sunbonnet converted into a helmet, was compelled to represent to her small person a whole beleaguering army?

For wet days there were the garrets with the little, low cupboards, where nobody over four feet could stand upright, but where, nevertheless, lions were insecurely chained, ready to spring out on the least provocation, and bears were heard to growl in the little one under the window, next to that inhabited indifferently by Mr. Maul, with his bludgeon and his bones (he generally occupied it

on Monday, since Sunday was 'Pilgrim's' day), and Mr. Bluebeard, in search of a new wife.

'And I think it's very nasty and selfish of you never to be the new Mrs. Bluebeard, Cynthia,' Francie would say; 'and I would hang you on the brass hook, too, though all the other wives has only got wooden pegs. You're the selfishest person I ever knew.'

Cynthia wept bitter tears over this accusation, though she said humbly, between her sobs—

'But how could I play with you, Francie, if I was deaded?' For it was understood when you made believe at funerals you always came to life again; but to be hanged in the dark cupboard with the other wives, represented by nursie's spare gowns, offered no such hope of reprieve.

'I hate a cry-baby,' this from Francie, still hot and angry; 'it's only girls that cries.' Then, with one of the sudden repentances which so easily earned him pardon from most people, he put his arm round Cynthia's neck and rubbed her eyes with his own pinafore, and finally consoled her by his generous offer of a sticky acid drop, found unexpectedly in the bottom of his knicker pocket. The sweets of which this was sole survivor had indeed been bought with Cynthia's money, she being the capitalist of the pair, earning with unfailing regularity a weekly penny, for remembering to brush her teeth every morning. Francie, with a boy's

contempt for such refinements, applied his tooth-louch to the many much more obvious uses for which it was evidently intended, such as painting a white doll into a nigger with stolen blacklead, or cleaning the canary's cage; but he was always quite as ready to spend Cynthia's penny as she was to have it spent. Indeed, it was characteristic of Francis throughout life to be generous with other people's property, and share it with as gay an air as if it was his own.

There was in this same garret a stuffed crocodile, with sinister eyes of glass, that inspired the children in equal degree with terror (when 'supposing' became too real), and with interest and even affection, as an ally in so many desperate situations. Also an elephant's tooth, and a flying-fish, poised upon a high shelf, and believed to take wing only in the nighttime. At least, in the daytime it was always found on the same spot, looking vacantly out of the dim garret window at the sky, which perhaps it mistook for the sea.

These things had been brought home by a long-dead Uncle Matthew, of whom nursie had many legends, a far more living personality to both than their own father, who had never, so far as they knew, collected anything except books. As it happened, it was while engaged upon a secret enterprise with a view to a peep at Uncle Matthew's foreign shells and coins in the carved cabinet in the

library, that Francie and Cynthia made the acquaintance of a new relative.

To steal unseen behind the baize door made their hearts thump with a sensation of embarking on adventure. Behind it lay the kingdom of the grown-ups—the father and grandmother who could do just as they liked, and had so poor a realisation of their privileges that they sat indoors even on the sunniest day, and went of their own accord—without being goaded to it—to wash their hands and faces!

It was not a very familiar world to the pair, though they knew all the engravings on the staircase, and had made up a history for the bronze lady with the lamp, who had so few clothes on that she must certainly have been shipwrecked; and it had long been a settled affair that Cynthia must only tread on the white squares in the hall, while Francie kept the black ones exclusively for himself. It was, indeed, the failure of Cynthia's little fat legs to reach from one white chequer to another, causing her to slip and fall, that brought about the meeting. At her smothered cry, the library door was quickly opened and a little old lady in a black dress and quaint bonnet with a white rim inside it came quickly out.

'My dear, I hope you have not hurt yourself?' she said, with tender anxiety, stooping with out-held hands. Cynthia, seated, her straight legs

before her, winked away her tears to stare up into the pretty, old, pink-and-white face bent so kindly above her, but it was Francie who spoke.

'Cynthia falled down,' he said, 'because she had no her slippy shoes, but she's done crying now.'

'What's a brave little girl,' said the old lady, smiling; 'and I think she must be the Cynthia who has a brother called Francie.'

'Please,' said Francie, impressed by this evidence of superior knowledge, 'are you a fairy godmother?'

'Ah, you are thinking of my stick!' said the old lady smilingly, 'but you see I am just as afraid as little Cynthia of the slippery tiles. Dears, I am your mother's mother'—her eyes looked infinite back at them—'your Granny Chayne. No,' she said, anticipating their surprise, 'I daresay you have not heard of me before, because I have been far away in a country over the sea.'

'Did you come to see Uncle Matthew's c'lection?'

asked Francie, still the spokesman. His little, eager face was all lighted up with interest. 'There's bags and heaps of little and big moneys laid out to come, but we mayn't touch them, only look. How say? Uncle Matthew must have been 'norr-ously rich to have all that money and never want to spend it.'

'And there's shells,' said Cynthia, pressing nearer the old lady, who had picked her up and was holding her by the hand.

'And you can hear the sea in the big ones,' cried Francie, unwilling to be forestalled as narrator. 'I'll hold one to your ear, and if you listen you'll hear it just roaring.'

'And I shall think that I am sailing in the great ship again,' granny acquiesced, letting herself be pulled back into the library; 'but there I had only dream children to think of and plan about, and now I have a real little boy and girl, with whom I hope to be dear friends.'

'Have you come to stay?' asked Francie. 'Have you brought your boxes, and did Thomas bring them in the luggage-cart?—because he never told us.'

'My boxes are at the station still. I walked here by the lanes, which I remembered quite well, for I used to come here when I was a girl.'

'That must be a long time ago,' said Francie, 'for your hair is white.'

'Yes, dear, a long, long time ago.'

'Grandmamma's hair is yellow—at least, a kind of yellow—like the sandy cat's kitten, but she never walks. She goes in the carriage, and Thomas sits on the box.'

'But this is granny,' said wise Cynthia.

Granny hugged the little maid and laughed.

'Cynthia is right,' she said; 'grannies are little old ladies with short skirts and thick boots, who don't mind the mud, and who like to trot about on

their own feet, and look about them and see everything that is going on in the hedges and ditches and among the tree-tops, slowly and comfortably.'

'We'll take you to our wood!' cried the boy. 'We'll show you all the nests. Nobody knows them but me and Cynthia.'

'And I will tell you stories,' said granny, 'about the far away country where your mother lived when she was little like you.'

'Tell us one now!' cried both children in a breath, which was, indeed, just what granny wished to do, since she rather suspected the visit to the collection was an unauthorised one. When they knew granny better, they found that, unlike grand-mamma, she very rarely said, 'You mustn't,' but generally managed to interest you so much in something else that you ceased to desire the forbidden thing.

Children, like dogs, very quickly know their friends, so in a trice the three were comfortably seated on the sofa, Cynthia on granny's knee, because, as Francie explained, the velvet pricked her legs, and granny had begun, in the only way in which the right kind of story can begin, 'Once upon a time.' It must have been a very interesting story, because it was so short, and when the 'happy ever after' bit was reached, two voices exclaimed, 'Is that all?'

'That is all,' said granny.

'Couldn't you make up a little more?' coaxed Cynthia, patting granny's pink cheeks.

'You might make a little more end,' suggested the boy; and obedient granny was about to try, when a step was heard in the hall, and the sound of a walking-stick being put in the stand.

'That's father,' said Francie; and at another time granny would have noticed that neither child ran to meet him, but she got up, looking rather agitated, and, with hands that trembled a little, put Cynthia gently from her lap. She had to lean a hand on the back of the carved sofa to steady her little, slight body, that looked as if any sort of emotion would blow it away, and the voice in which she uttered the one word 'James!' was scarcely more than a whisper.

Sir James, after the first moment of surprise, was greatly moved too, and all he could find to say, as he hurried forward and seized her by both hands was 'Mother!' and he bent down and kissed her, just as if she was really and truly his mother, and not the new granny.

And it seemed very odd to the watching spectators behind the sofa that these two people who were both quite, quite old should hold hands and look at each other almost as if they were going to cry. But presently they sat down and began to talk about lost letters, and time-tables and trains,

and other stupid things that interest grown-ups, until granny turned round and said—

'But you see I have been very well amused while I was waiting.' Then, in a lower voice, 'The boy to like her, James.'

But James turned too, and looked at the children rather moodily. He opened his mouth just as if he were going to say as usual, 'You'd better go upstairs,' but to their great wonder he said instead, 'You may stay down for a little to see your granny;' and as staying down meant having lunch in the dining room, with Thomas to pour the milk into the silver mugs, it was certainly a very red-letter day indeed.

When Grandmamma Considine, who had been louching out, came home, the house seemed somehow much less peaceful. Grandmamma made a rattling noise when she moved, like the leaves on the gravel drive as they fled before the broom when Peter swept it on Saturday, and her words, which were almost as plentiful as the leaves, made a much bigger flutter when they fell. They sounded almost rude, though she spoke in such a ladylike voice that you could never be sure whether it wasn't *you* who were vulgar for thinking *she* could be!

She said that surprises were almost always a mistake, especially if one hadn't met for years, when, naturally, people were so changed that you would really never have known them. If Mrs. Chayne

had thought of sending a note, or even a postcard—if she approved of those disagreeable modern inventions—there would have been more chance of making her room comfortable than you could expect, with servants who would *not* bestir themselves for anybody in a hurry. But of course colonial ways were different. She had been told that it was quite the habit for people to invite themselves to dinner there, and even on long visits! And wouldn't Mrs. Chayne come and take off her boots? Really, to walk from the station—when the horses were eating their heads off in the stable, and the dear Talbots would quite have excused her from going to lunch if she had explained—and what people would say she could not imagine.

She spoke to granny then, and during the remainder of her visit, as if she were almost a child, or else very old (which is another sort of childhood), but, if the leaf in the family Bible had not been pasted down, it would have been seen that grandmamma was really by quite a year the elder of the two. There is a vast difference in the way in which people take time's advances. Granny met them with a smile, never minding the graving tools that carve little wrinkles, and the winter touch that makes snow of brown hair; asking only that her soul might keep undecayed its faith and hope, and her heart its young freshness; while grandmamma was chiefly concerned that at sixty the world should

will take her to be forty. And as life turns most people either into grannies or grandmamas, you can judge for yourself which plan answers best!

Granny's presence had as soothing an effect as the balmy spell we often get in the middle of March's bleakness, and when she wanted to go away again Sir James would not hear of it. There was the cottage at the end of the fir-wood, which happened to be empty, and there, after some little persuasion, she and her old servant, Martha, and some equally old and much more comfortable furniture, took root. The children's feet wore a new path between the solemn trees, so often did they tread it to reach the little house, and Cynthia, who had quaint fancies, called it 'The Peace Way.'

Grandmamma kept order by rule; for everything you wanted to do, or would naturally do, being a child, she had a 'don't' to snap off your head with.

'Don't poke with your chin,' 'don't lean with your elbows on the table,' 'don't sniff,' 'don't whisper,' 'don't help yourself to the largest piece of cake,' 'don't talk till you're spoken to'—'don't,' in short, covered the whole field of life. Granny hadn't a single 'don't' in her dictionary, but there was such a halo about her of lovely unselfishness that you couldn't be rude, or grasping, or greedy, or ill-mannered in her company. For years and years of true thoughts, affections free from any taint of

selfish desire, love that was reflected from the Divine Presence itself, made such a harmony of granny's outer and her inner life that to disturb it, or to bring grief to that dear face, would have been the very worst punishment one could conceive.

CHAPTER III



IT came at last, the day when Francie was to go to school. He had led up to this fate himself for some months, by trying, by way of experiment, how naughty it was possible for a boy to be without incurring the punishment of being sent supperless to bed. Grand-mamma Considine was naturally the first to lose patience with chronic bad behaviour; but even granny, who had a great deal of sympathy with high spirits and the natural effervescence of youth which accounts for so many breaches of nursery law, agreed that it would be better for Francie himself, and better for his little sister too, that he should be under wise and firm guidance. So nurse—who would not let Jane put a stitch into them, though she could scarcely see, even with her spectacles, to do white seam—hemmed his sheets, bedewing them with secret tears; his knife, fork, and spoon had been selected from the plate-chest, Francie and Cynthia assisting at the choice, and his play-box, with his own initials in staring white paint, stood

in the night-nursery, where Francie could walk round it, and view it with pride from every aspect. His new clothes—real trousers and an Eton jacket—gave the finishing touch to his swaggering pride, and seemed to place him at an infinitely remote distance from Cynthia, whose little heart was nearly broken at the thought of the parting. She was too humble to resent Francie's large airs of superiority in these last days, his boastful anticipations, his entire absorption in the future. She had never once thought that Francie would miss *her*, but even when he collapsed at the station and squeezed away a tear with his knuckle, thrusting into Cynthia's hand his second-best knife with the broken blade, which he had meant to take as well as the new one, and promising to write to her every Sunday—it was still with her own desolation she was entirely occupied. She wrapped the knife in some treasured sheets of silver chocolate-paper, and laid it sacredly away in her birthday workbox, never giving a thought to the collection of crests, and all her spare cash—the toothbrush money and the dandelion shilling (a farthing a root)—which she had insisted on lavishing on Francie. To hear it jingle in his pocket gave her the only comfort she knew, except laboriously calculating, on the back of granny's Shakespeare Calendar, the weeks and days until the Christmas holidays.

Into her sweet young thoughts of reunion there

came no prevision of the changed Francie who would return in less than three short months; since, happily for us, it takes many partings to make us realise that, set we sail never so merrily from the harbour together, it is across an unpathed, solitary sea we each must voyage, with calms that lull and storms that beat and break for us alone. She was only wishing disconsolately that granny—who was unfortunately away on a visit—was at home, or that granny's Martha wasn't so cross, so that she might have ascertained the exact number of hours and minutes too.

With her sunbonnet hanging down her back, her eyes cast down disconsolately, and the points of her shabby garden-shoes stubbing the moss between the ridged tree-roots, she was going aimlessly home, when, at a bend of the walk, she came face to face with her father. Perhaps Sir James was the more taken aback of the two, though Cynthia stared to see him there, not knowing what spells there were for him, too, in the Peace Way and the little house it led to. He really knew very little of this small, brown daughter, content that she was in the care of the good woman who had nursed her mother; but something in the child's woebegone aspect moved him uncomfortably.

'I suppose you are missing your brother,' he said, and was immediately aware that this was one of those obvious facts to which children never think of replying.

'He'll be coming home again, you know,' he went on, with an attempt to be consolatory; 'and you'll have to be learning too, presently. Should you like to go to school?'

'Francie's school?' asked the child, with a flash of hope in the deep-set grey eyes.

'No'—he was quite sorry to quench it. 'Little girls don't go to boys' schools. But—we might have a nice lady here to teach you and walk with you.'

'I don't want no other lady but granny,' said Cynthia, with mournful decision,—'and nursie,' she added, being a loyal little soul, 'and Jane, when she isn't cross and tugs.' Then, as if this enumeration of her friends brought home more keenly than ever the loss of the dearest, her little breast heaved. 'I want Francie, oh, I do, I do!' she wailed, and, throwing herself down among the fir needles, sobbed out the full cup of her grief.

Sir James was genuinely distressed, too little used to the part of comforter, and yet feeling an old, pleasurable thrill when he won a watery smile from the child on assuring her that she should have her first lessons from granny's own lips. Her grief had burst the strings of her sunbonnet, and he tied it with fumbling fingers, and brushed the fir needles out of her socks, and wished, as he saw her toddle on alone, that he had gone with her, and half started forward, and yet did not go, after all. But the

Peace Way was not half so lonely to the child as he fancied, for it was the Necropolis of all the dead pets; where more than one canary slept in a match-box, with a tally for a tombstone; and Soot, the much-mourned black kitten (who took a whole handbox, contributed by nursie), and Cynthia's latest pink-and-white doll, Miss Evangeline, reluctantly sacrificed to Francie's experiments in surgery—and Cynthia had to stop at each grave and tell its inhabitant that Francie was gone, as Peter told the bees when Mrs. Brand at the lodge died.

'She's an odd child,' said Sir James, when he went to see his mother-in-law on her return; 'I can't make her out!' Then he sighed. 'She has nothing of Margaret in her.'

'She is like her grand-aunt Cynthia,' said Mrs. Chayne; 'and if there is any truth in the thought that we grow in character to resemble those whose names we bear, I am glad you chose so good a pattern for the little Cynthia to copy. Cynthia Considine was a very fine woman, James.'

'You know more about the Considines than I, by right of the old family friendship; but I must say my recollections of old Aunt Cynthia present her as rather more awe-inspiring than lovable.'

'She was, like her generation,' granny smiled, '(I am no good example of it, my dear), taught to think it a duty to repress any expression of feeling as a habit that might lead to weakness, but the

strong, loyal, generous nature was not hidden from those who loved her under the mask of coldness.'

"God be thanked, the meanest of His creatures
Boasts two soul-sides,"'

murmured Sir James. 'The pity is, we so often judge a fellow-mortal by the one worn "to face the world with"! All the same, I'm glad Margaret's daughter will have a less heroic model to start with. I've pledged you to be her first teacher.'

'We'll go to school together!' said granny gaily. 'I'm but an old-fashioned body, but there was not so much harm in the old ways and the old notions as some people think, and Schoolmaster Time hammers a few useful lessons into the stupidest head!'

So Cynthia was saved for two whole years from the threatened governess, and went daily, with her 'Reading without Tears' tucked under her short arm, down the Peace Way to the cottage at the end of it.

Cynthia took very naturally to reading, being her father's true daughter in this respect; but, in spite of all granny's patience, writing remained an unconquered territory; and as arithmetic was, by confession, granny's own weak point, only one of the three necessary R's may be said to have had justice done to it. It somewhat consoled the teacher that the little girl showed an aptitude for the ex-

quisite 'white seam' which was part of every educational curriculum in granny's own youth. But of infinitely more value than any mere accomplishment was the training given to heart and mind in the daily example of a loving and unselfish life. Even here, we may enter on the promised heirship of God's peace, by wishing nothing to happen to ourselves but what He wills, and by always thinking first of and for others; and in granny the serenity that will flood any life so lived was touched with a tender, gay mirthfulness that made you feel at once she had never forgotten (as so many of us do) the way back to the beautiful Arcadia of youth.

Granny was the very best of playmates; she could 'suppose' far better than nursie, who was always forgetting the character she had assumed, and turning into her own self at wrong minutes; she had a whole bookseller's shop of stories stored in her quick brain, under the soft tulle cap, and a bag of 'bits' hanging on the box-room nail, out of which she contrived the most wonderful presents. She proved, too, to be quite as fond of 'collections' as Uncle Matthew, of a humbler but more convenient sort, such as you could get at home, with no more outfit than a pair of goloshes and a digging-fork. Sometimes it was ferns or mosses, or the bark of different trees, or leaves to skeletonise in the rain-water tub; sometimes it was an expedition without spoils, to study the ways of birds, or the habits of

strange creatures that hide in the wood's green deeps. Wherever granny took one exploring, one was sure of very good fun, and Cynthia owed her love of Nature to those early scrambles in the fresh mornings or hot summer evenings, when granny talked as if she were in league with Mother Earth, and knew most of her secrets.

Needless to say, Grandmamma Considine did not at all approve of this desultory education; but, indeed, she made it a rule of conduct to disapprove of every project she did not herself initiate. It simplifies life very much to be sure you are always right.

'Is the child to grow up a savage?' she asked her son. 'She is learning nothing, that I can see, except to think that you may be as messy and untidy as you like if you hide it under the name of natural history. I said to nurse yesterday, "Bruce, I dislike scientific dirt as much as any other dirt, and Miss Cynthia must *not* make a wheelbarrow of her pinafore, or a dust-heap of her nursery." The child's complexion is being ruined; and mark my words, James, if you don't take care, she will grow up quite odd and eccentric.'

Sir James pished and pshawed, and returned to his library, but he was a man who hated trouble, and his mother was clever enough to reckon on his dislike of importunity. He finally took his grievance to the cottage; but, to his surprise, granny was a witness for the defence.

'Your mother is quite right,' she said, 'and I shall tell her so myself to-morrow. It is time now that Cynthia was learning more than I can teach, and the little one ought to have a companion nearer the level of her own years. I hope Lady Considine will find a nice, bright, clever girl who will win her confidence. I shall not miss my little pupil so sadly if I know she is happy.'

'She is happy enough now,' said her father, 'and she looks the picture of health. I can't think why my mother makes such a fuss.' But Lady Considine knew, and continued to make it until he gave in.

Cynthia's first governess was a Miss Pritchard, and her chief recommendation seemed to be that she had been five years with the Talbot girls, and it was known to everybody that *they* had the flattest backs and carried their heads better on their shoulders than any other girls in the county.

'It would be more to the point to know what they carried *inside* their heads,' said Sir James; but his mother instantly retorted, 'At least, you won't find *them* doing anything *outré*; they are like all really well-brought-up girls, *they* know how to behave in every kind of emergency, and *you* know exactly what to expect of them. And, my dear James, if you had been a mother yourself, you would know what a comfort that is!'

But though Miss Pritchard's reign at Fordedge lasted two years, she never succeeded in moulding

Cynthia after the approved pattern. Even in childhood, Cynthia had a good deal of individuality, and though her shoulders grew flat with much enforced repose upon the backboard, her head continued to entertain its own fancies, and her loyal feet to follow granny.

Miss Pritchard was a conscientious woman, but she was dull, and her teaching was as savourless as unsalted porridge. She was a great believer in 'facts'; and Cynthia, who was conscientious too, learned long strings of dates off by heart, without attaching any kind of interest to them. 1087 would bring up William Rufus, or William Rufus 1087, as if it were a kind of ornamental addition to his name, but not until she learned by chance that 'Rufus' meant 'the red-headed,' did it dawn upon her that this king with the carrotty locks was a living man with a story of his own. And so with everything else. Miss Pritchard presented dry bones; Cynthia longed for palpitating flesh to cover them; Miss Pritchard thought fancies a kind of story-telling, and did her best to discourage them; she thought collections foolish, unless when labelled in public museums; she shuddered at sight of a worm, and took no interest in flowers except when cut and sent in by the gardener; but she was exceedingly particular about dress and deportment, and the things that ought to be done, and those others which must be left undone — and both

the do's and the don't's were as strictly tabulated in her mind as the reigns of the English kings.

Poor Cynthia toiled behind her along the bare, bleak turnpike of life, a dull uninterested pilgrim, with only occasional gleams of happiness, when she could escape to granny, or when Francie came home.

CHAPTER IV



HE will never be pretty, and I'm afraid she will never have any manners!'

'Then perhaps it is time she learned to spell.'

'Spelling isn't everything!' said Lady Considine with annoyed emphasis. 'Some of the best people never master it. I remember dear Lady Mabel Muff—she was a Berrybridge, and she married the Hon. Algy Muff—she used always to keep a little pocket-dictionary on her writing-table to consult when she answered invitations. Indeed, when she wrote to me about those rooms in Tidy's Hotel, I quite recall that she spelt apartments with two p's.'

'A muff indeed!' said Sir James, with his quiet smile; 'but as I am not a lord, and Cynthia cannot hope to marry an honourable, she must learn to do without the dictionary.'

'Why should not Cynthia marry well?' demanded grandmamma.

'Cynthia is not quite twelve.'

'Cynthia will grow up,' retorted grandmamma

sharply. 'If she were left to me, I should see that she had proper advantages. What possible objection can you have to Miss Pritchard, James?'

'None in the world,' said Sir James promptly, 'except that, as Cynthia's back is now quite flat, it seems to me to be time to consider the emptiness of her head. Frank does nothing at school, and one dunce is enough in a small family.'

'You will never get anybody to take such pains with her figure as Miss Pritchard, and that is of the utmost importance here, where it is impossible to get deportment lessons, or that new Swedish drill.'

'She can have a pony,' said Sir James, who had been edging nearer the door with every sentence. 'I daresay she will like that quite as well as the backboard. And if you can find a woman with a little common-sense'—

'My dear,' said Lady Considine, 'it is you who have dismissed Miss Pritchard, and it is you who must find her successor. I wash my hands of the whole matter.'

This was all very well, but Sir James knew that, choose whom he might, his mother had already made up her mind that she was the wrong person. Those who are most ready to offer you freedom of choice generally reserve the right to criticise your selection.

'Boys are bad enough, but for a man's sins give him a girl to bring up,' he said to granny. 'A boy

must take the risks along with the gains of school life, but surely it ought to be the easiest thing in the world to get a girl taught all she needs to know at home; to be honourable and truthful, and neither giggling, nor sentimental, nor underhand, and to have a decent acquaintance with the language and literature of her own country, if she doesn't master that of any other. It's not much to ask, and yet, out of those hundreds of certificated women who engage to teach all the 'ologies under the sun, there isn't one that seems to have any idea of education apart from cramming.'

'Cynthia will not disappoint you in these ways,' said granny. 'She has a fine, upright nature and a very affectionate heart, as well as a serviceable intellect.'

'Yet not even you can make her what you made her mother,' said the widower heavily. 'It is hard to realise that she is Margaret's child.'

'I think Margaret brought herself up,' said granny gently; 'such gifts and graces as she had came direct from Nature. You know, dear son, I could not afford to give her the best teachers, and she had not many of the advantages your mother has every right to ask for Cynthia. In these days much more is expected of a girl than when Margaret was young.'

'And much less obtained,' said Sir James drily. 'I would much rather my daughter's head remained

empty than that it was furnished with the modern notions of women's rights and wrongs.'

But Sir James's ideal, like most ideals, was rather difficult to attain, so his search ended in a sudden loss of patience on his part, and a hurried settlement with the candidate who seemed least unlikely, instead of the impossible person who was entirely suitable.

Miss Armitage's moral equipment was all one could desire; indeed, she proved to be one of those over-scrupulous people who pamper conscientiousness till it becomes a disease. She had great stores of information, but she was a bad teacher, apt to hesitate in search of absolute accuracy, and to overlay a statement with so many illustrations and explanations, that it was speedily lost sight of, and very rarely turned up again. Her habits, too, were as unmethodical as her mind was undisciplined. She was, in short, too fussy as well as too diffident to do justice to her real powers, and, with a kind of mental astigmatism, a lack of focusing power, was apt to see the littles and the bigs of life all of one size.

'Father says you ought to have clear outlines,' said Cynthia to her confidante, 'but how can you, when you don't know which is the edge and which is the middle because it's all a muzzy haze? And, oh, granny! if Miss Armitage would only leave me alone sometimes, I think I could get things cleared

up in my mind ; but, except when I come to you (and you know you often invite her too), or when I'm asleep, she is always with me, and play-times are just as bad as lesson-times.'

'She thinks it her duty; and, Cynthy, my little one, it is better to have an exaggerated idea of duty than to lift no standard over our heads to look up to. And we must remember there is nothing selfish in her devotion, for the extra hours she gives to you are just so many taken from her own recreation.'

'It would be much more sensible if she stayed in the schoolroom and darned her stockings,' said Cynthia, with grave, practical wisdom. 'They have such big holes! And I picked up two white buttons and a black one yesterday that had come off some of her things.'

'Suppose we ask her to tea to-morrow, and have a darning and mending bee? Perhaps it would be a change for her to talk to an old lady for a little while, and Martha shall make some of her cream scones.'

'Very well, granny,' Cynthia acquiesced with a sigh; 'but it won't be half so nice as having you all to myself.'

'I want you to see, dearie, that there are two ways of looking at everything.'

'If there were only two! but Miss Armitage's things have all twenty sides at least, and you

don't know which side is the one you should choose.'

Granny laughed.

'You and I will be content with two for the present! For perhaps, Cynthia, this constant supervision which seems to you a grievance and an injustice, may appear to God only an attempt to live up to the claims of a very tender conscience; since, happily for us, He judges our motives rather than our imperfect deeds.'

Granny, at least, invariably saw but one side, and that the best, of everybody, and had a gift of drawing it out so that others saw it too. Miss Armitage did not seem so nervously fussy in granny's cool little drawing-room, and actually consented to lean back in one of the chintz-covered chairs, forgetting for the time the small mortifications she thought it right to practise, such as declining a footstool, though her legs were so short; refusing her aching spine the consolation of a cushion, or her palate the pleasure of sugar in her tea. She was not at all likely, with her anxious, worrying temperament, to fall a victim, as she dreaded, to self-indulgence, but clever people are often surprisingly stupid in knowing the points in themselves which require defence.

'A good nap every afternoon over a book would do her more good than all her needless penances, poor soul,' thought granny; 'it would soothe her

nerves, and help her to see things in their just proportions.'

But since granny could not prescribe the nap, she hailed the arrival of the pony with almost as much glee as Cynthia herself. The two spent an afternoon trying to find a name for it, beginning with Pegasus (rejected because the grooms were quite sure to shorten it into 'Peggy') and ending rather prosaically with Whitefoot, which was at least literally descriptive of the pretty little roan with the solitary stocking. On Whitefoot's back Cynthia could escape even Miss Armitage's anxious pursuit, and for an hour or two breathe fresh air without any fretting reminders of lessons or deportment. Her father laughed at the idea of her being accompanied, and in the lanes and along the highways she was indeed as safe as if she had had a retinue of defenders.

Grandmamma of course disapproved.

'I hope you will never live to regret it, my dear,' she said to her son, in that tone—implying a certainty that he would—which he found specially aggravating. But nobody could regret Cynthia's improved looks, her brighter expression, her heartier interest in work, now that she could take full advantage of play-hours. Whitefoot became her dearest companion, next to granny; she could not keep him out of the letters she still faithfully wrote to Francie on every Saturday half-holiday. She had long

since, though not without some very bitter secret tears, adjusted herself to the new Francie who came home from school, despising girls, and almost rudely contemptuous of their amusements and occupations, but condescendingly ready to accept Cynthia's companionship when there was nothing else to do. She was too sweet-natured to resent his neglect, or his capricious favours, and was glad to be allowed to intercede for him when he wanted more pocket-money (which was not seldom), to take care of his pets and treasures when he was away, and fag untiringly for him when he was at home.

'Francie is coming home'—she confided her joy to Augustus, now an elderly, rather lazy dog—'and I've got you a new blue ribbon, dear old boy, to make you look smart, so don't wrinkle your dear nose as if you didn't like it!'

Augustus wagged a foolish stump of a tail, and slobbered with sympathy, though he pawed the ribbon off at the first convenient moment, when his little mistress was not looking. Cynthia was at the station to meet her brother, and as he got out of the carriage he nodded and turned up a cool pink cheek for her to peck at. Cynthia had to stand on tiptoe to reach it, and it was a recurrent disappointment that her kiss somehow always missed the full fervour she meant to put into it.

'I say,' he said, 'we'll let Thomas collect my traps—but see you take care of my new fishing-rod,

Thomas—and we'll cut round by the stables and see this precious pony of yours you've yarned about in all your letters.'

Cynthia's face was a conflict between doubt and delight.

'But father and grandmamma will expect you,' she hesitated, 'and granny came purposely to the house to meet you.'

'That's all right. If you'll hurry up we can get over the kitchen-garden wall, and be at the front door as soon as the luggage-cart.'

Cynthia studied her brother's face while he studied the pony, and as she saw it cloud with envy, her own fell.

'I call it an awful shame,' he burst out at last, 'that you should have a pony, and not me. It's all rot teaching girls to ride; they never do anything but amble along the high road, and if they do go out with the pack, they're just in a man's way. How many times have you tumbled off?'

'Once,' said Cynthia falteringly.

'Once!' he echoed, with contempt. 'I call it a beastly sell! That pony ought to have been mine.'

'Oh, Francie,' said the soft Cynthia, 'Whitefoot will belong to both of us. He'll be half yours.'

'What's the good of half anything!' he grumbled, but his face cleared a little. 'Look here,' he said, 'mind you stick to that bargain. And since it's your

pony, and you want to give me a present, I suppose you'll let me choose which half?'

'Which days, do you mean?' she asked, bewildered.

'Which half, goosie. Well, I'll choose the front half, because I'm the oldest; and you needn't look as if you thought I was taking the most, because, you see, I'll have all the feeding to do, and the bridle to get and everything, while your half won't cost you anything.'

'But I don't pay anything now!' she said, as mystified as ever by this line of argument, but glad that Francie should laugh and look pleased.

She had a practical illustration of his meaning the next day. She had been summoned to the drawing-room to entertain a young girl of her own age, but a much more grown-up personage, who had called with her mother. Cynthia, who could not but feel that her guest was rather bored, suggested a walk in the garden. Amy Lethbridge yawned and assented.

'Show me the dogs,' she said; and as they were walking towards the kennels, Francie suddenly appeared on Whitefoot.

'Why,' said Amy, with a laugh, 'I thought that was your pony. You told me you were going to ride.'

'It's half Francie's,' said loyal Cynthia, with a blush. Francie looked so gay and handsome,

making Whitefoot jump and frisk, that her heart melted within her.

He waved his straw hat to the two girls.

‘I couldn’t help it, Cynthy,’ he said lightly. ‘You see, I got upon *my* half, and *your* half came behind!’

Amy laughed again.

‘Boys are mountains of selfishness!’ she said.

CHAPTER V



HE new people have arrived at the rectory,' said Lady Considine one day at lunch. 'You didn't tell me Mr. Terry was a married man, James?'

'How should I know?' asked Sir James. 'The living is not in my gift. You are in possession of all my information about Mr. Terry. But Twickenham tells me he's an excellent man for the place.'

'We all know Lord Twickenham's Indian predilections,' said Lady Considine, with a plain air of disapproval. 'I should scarcely have thought an ex-chaplain very well suited for a country parish. However, as there is a wife, I suppose I shall have to call. There is a girl too, I believe. Cynthia, put on your best hat, and be ready punctually at a quarter to four, and I shall take you with me.'

Cynthia blushed for the pleasure and the honour of the thing, but Francie made a disdainful face. 'Another girl!' he said. 'Are there no boys, grandmamma?'

'None, I believe, so I won't take you with me, Frank.'

'Hadn't you better wait till they've unpacked?' asked Sir James; 'they probably won't have even a chair to offer you.'

But Lady Considine overruled this. She said significantly, 'You know what those Indian people are!' as if ex-Indians usually invited their visitors to sit cross-legged on the floor. 'Besides, we are their nearest neighbours.' She did not confess that curiosity was her ruling motive for haste. The late rector had been an infirm old man, quite useless socially; it remained to be seen whether the newcomers were an acquisition or otherwise.

The excitement had reached even the quiet haven of the nursery. When Cynthia went in as usual to be inspected before coming under grandmamma's sharp eyes, nursie pushed aside the bundle of linen she was mending, and looked up anxiously over her spectacles at the tall child.

'You'll behave pretty, Miss Cynthia dear?' she said coaxingly, as she gave a pat to a fold or a tug to a skirt, 'and talk nicely to the new young lady? Jane saw her from the blue-room window—shaking out her duster, she says, but idling her master's time, I say—and she's just a picture to look at, with yellow hair all in curls and laughing as merry as you like, on the top of the feather-bed in Judson's cart, and something spilt every minute, for there

never was the like of Job Judson for carelessness!’

Cynthia quite understood that it was Jane who shook a delinquent duster—as if it were a flag of welcome—and that pictured ride of the triumphant Miss Kitty upon a billowy throne sounded inviting, but she heaved a deep sigh as she said—

‘I’m glad she’s not stuck-up, and I’m glad she’s pretty, but I wish she had been a boy, for Francie to play with.’

‘Master Francie can’t have everything,’ said nursie, ‘and this new little lady will be a nice friend and companion for you to talk with and go walks with, and maybe do lessons with, too. So you’ll not look solemn-like, Miss Cynthia, as if you had dear knows how many cares to carry on your young shoulders, which comes of living with them that are near done with life, and a pity too. It stands to reason that youth should keep company with youth. Let me put in that second button, Miss Cynthia. Your grandmamma is that particular, and quite right too, and if some people we could name was more so’—Nurse Bruce pursed up her lips, but only for an instant, for she continued in the same breath—‘and if it’s asking to tea will help you to be friends, I’m sure my lady won’t object, and I’ll coax *cook myself to bake a pound cake, and there’s the strawberry jam over that I made for Master Francie’s last hamper. And mind the wheel, Miss Cynthia

dear, for your grandmamma can't abide mud, and take off your gloves if there's muffins for tea.'

But there was no tea, and so, as a consequence, there were no muffins either.

The rectory was quite at hand, in a dip of the hillside close to the lodge gate, and not many yards from the little old church with the tall Norman tower. It was scarcely worth while to have out the carriage, except upon the principle that it is an advantage to impress people at the outset of your acquaintance. Grandmamma certainly looked very imposing in her best lace and feathers, and her demeanour grew more and more dignified as various articles of household use—the overflow from Judson's cart—were discerned upon the road. A frying-pan had alighted upon the bank, where it looked singularly out of place among the young greenery of spring; a wash-stand with the paint half scrubbed off, stood leaning dissipatedly on three legs against the garden gate, and a little farther on was a cane-bottomed chair with a hole in the seat, usurping the middle of the pansy-bed.

'One would think it was a country fair!' said Lady Considine, with a disdainful nose. 'I wish I had left you at home, Cynthia.'

But Cynthia was too excited to echo the wish.

Almost before Thomas could descend, the rectory door flew open, and a young girl, about to rush forth impetuously, was only arrested by the sight of

the visitors. Two fox-terriers yelped excitedly at her heels. For but a second her dismay lasted, then her face recovered the smile which seemed its most natural expression. It was a lovely face, pink and white, dimpled and sunny, and her voice matched it for blithe sweetness.

‘Oh, were you coming in?’ she said, ‘and won’t you, please? I was only going for the milk, but *that* can wait. Father is putting up the beds, but he and mother will be so glad. And you don’t mind the dogs, I hope? Down, boys, down! Harum and Scarum don’t mean any harm.’

‘You are Miss Terry, I suppose?’ said Lady Considine, rather stiffly. ‘Cynthia, my dear child, do keep those muddy paws off your skirt!’

‘I’m so sorry; I’ll wipe it,’ murmured blushing Kitty.

‘Yes.’ She turned again to the girl: ‘If you are sure it will not disturb your mother, we will come in.’

Kitty led the way in silence. The hall was lumbered with furniture, and in the dining-room, to which she ushered the guests, a heap of Indian spoil—jail carpets, phulcarries, Bombay blackwood tables, tiger skins—lay piled. Boxes half unpacked yawned open; books threatened china in one corner; somebody had upset a bottle of ink, and a great black pool darkened the floor.

‘Please mind your dress,’ said Kitty to the elder lady. ‘Oh, there’s no chair! I’ll fetch you one!’

She brought back the chair and her mother together. Mrs. Terry was a tired-looking woman, with an exceedingly amiable expression and a very long, limp back, which she had a way of supporting with one hand behind her. 'The sort of woman for whom sofas and tea-gowns were invented,' Lady Considine said rather incisively to her son that evening. 'One of the invertebrate order. The parish won't get much good out of her. She will be shockingly imposed upon, and such absurd ideas as she has of her position! She was consulting me about engaging Mrs. Mitchell as cook—Mrs. Mitchell who sent up those perfect little dinners at the deanery. Why, Frampton isn't half as good! I couldn't help saying to her, "My good woman, unless your husband has a private fortune, I'm afraid you'll have to be content with a good general, and such help as your daughter can give her."'

'She won't go far astray with you as adviser-in-chief,' said Sir James half jestingly.

'I shall certainly not shrink from hindering Mrs. Terry making ridiculous mistakes. But I hope her husband has a little more stamina, or we shall be in a sad way. You must call on him, James. His wife excused him on the plea that he was putting down a carpet in her bedroom. Rather unclerical, but I daresay the poor man has been driven to do her share as well as his own by that silly wife of his.'

'Even if you only allow her one maid, you might

excuse her laying down carpets,' said Sir James. 'Why don't you send Joel round? As an old soldier he can put his hand to anything.'

'Oh, my dear, if you begin with offering help the very first day, there will be no end to that sort of thing. I am sure I have no wish to wrong Mrs. Terry, though I never have much opinion of those dressing-gowny, waistless women, but she looks to me just the sort of person to be running out of everything in store-cupboard and larder, and counting on her nearest neighbour to make good the deficiency. Depend upon it, if you give them any encouragement, it will be coals one day and candles the next; and badly as Frampton fries fish, I wouldn't have her put out for the world.'

Sir James was too indolent to combat his mother's hasty conclusions, but he was too conscientious to adopt them, without corroboration, as his own. He wisely resolved to wait and judge for himself.

When he came to know the rector he found him a man of tireless energy; Indian suns had made him lean and brown, but no heat had conquered his active spirit or subdued the need of his nature to be constantly busy. He had many hobbies, and took them up one after another with a young light-heartedness that was inspiring. Such a man leaves his women-kind very little scope for household activity, and Mrs. Terry might be excused when she laughingly declared that it was her part to look on.

Cynthia had been making observations too, guided chiefly by a sort of instinct for what was true and pure, in part the fruit of a consistent example. And it was not difficult to fall under Kitty's spell.

'Come and sit here.' She led her companion to a rolled-up pile of carpets. 'Oh, you don't know how glad I am that you are here, for there were lots of girls in the school where I was, and I was afraid it would be lonely, even with the dearest father and mother to come home to. But then, you see, I didn't know them then, except in letters, and there are such heaps of things you can't put into letters. But a girl for your own friend is nice. Are you thirteen yet?'

'Thirteen next birthday—in June.'

'And I was thirteen last March. That makes us almost twins.'

'Weren't you in India, then?'

'Only when I was very small. When I shut my eyes, or when I'm just falling asleep, I can see some things, the white, shining houses and the brown natives, but then I've heard so much of India always that sometimes I daresay I mix up what I remember and what I've been told.'

'I've been always here, with Francie,' Cynthia volunteered, 'but now he goes to school.'

'Your brother? I wonder how it feels to have a brother or a sister? There's never been any more of us but me. But my daddy is as good as ten

brothers; he can do nearly everything, and he lets me help him. Do you like carpentering? We're going to have a carving-class for the boys in the village, and I'm to have a garden of my own. Father won't help me a bit with that, for he says I must learn by the pain of my own mistakes and failures; but it will be so horrid to see the poor flowers die, if I don't coddle them enough.'

'Granny will help you; she's got the kind of fingers that make things grow. She does love to grub! But you mustn't fuss too much, she says, for you can spoil plants just as you can spoil children.'

Kitty gazed across the room at the magnificent lady sitting as upright as if she had 'a cast-iron back' without a hinge, and looking over the top of her aquiline nose at her hostess uncomfortably perched on a dress-basket; and her blue eyes were full of questioning wonder.

'Does she spoil you much?' she asked under her breath.

'That is grandmamma,' said Cynthia quickly. 'Granny lives in the little house by the wood. She wears black dresses, and a little white shawl, and a soft white cap, and she looks like a nice kind of picture. She is what nursie calls young-old, for she says most ladies nowadays when they get on in years are old-young. I like granny's kind best, don't you?'

'I think I should,' said Kitty, laughing. 'Won't you take me to see her? And we might do our gardens together, only you'll have to be patient with me, because I don't know anything.'

Francie was loitering about in the avenue with an air of having come out to look at the view, and Cynthia begged to be set down.

'Well,' he said condescendingly, as she jumped from the step and ran after him, 'I suppose you and this girl have sworn to be bosom friends ever after?'

'Do boys do that?' she asked simply. 'I think she's very nice. She's going to keep charity hens, and so am I if father will let me, and we're going to do our gardens together. And she's very, very pretty, lovelier than poor dear Miss Evangeline that we buried in the Peace Way.'

'Pooh, a wax doll!'

But Francie became less supercilious when he heard of the Indian gods and idols, and the skins of wild beasts, and the rector's enthusiastic views on the subject of rabbit-hutches and dove-cotes, and he even volunteered to accompany his father when he went to make his call.

'I'm sure Mr. Terry will appreciate the honour, Frank,' said Sir James, with a bow.

Francie flushed up sensitively. He never understood his father's half-quizzical, half-sarcastic speeches.

Granny, who had come up to five o'clock tea, put her pretty little hand with the flashing rings on the boy's arm.

'Frank shows his good taste,' she said brightly, 'for I am told the rector is a capital good fellow. He and I are sure to hobnob, for Joel tells me he's a herbaceous borderer.'

CHAPTER VI



WANT to put in a word for poor Francie,' said granny, when next Sir James went to the cottage. 'I never had sons of my own, so perhaps you will think me a presumptuous old woman to have any opinion about boys, but I think there's a stage of their growth, between childhood and manhood, when they are quite as uncomfortable to themselves as perhaps they make themselves to us—the fermenting stage, when the adventurous boy runs away, and the boy who can't or daren't, frets out his soul in sulks and naughtiness. And I think perhaps, remembering how girls, too, suffer in their degree, I may venture to plead for Francie a little indulgent and sympathising understanding.' She hesitated, for Sir James, in the shadow of the window, where the fuchsias and the ferns made the light dim, neither moved nor spoke.

'Perhaps,' he said at last, 'I have failed to understand the boy, or to make the allowance he would have had freely from his mother and you; but it is because I find no clue to a nature that can neither

be moved by honourable desires nor be made ashamed of dishonourable failures.'

'He is very young,' murmured granny.

'He is old enough to know right from wrong. I cannot make a scholar of him against his will; but if he never read a word of all the books I have laboured to gather together, it would matter nothing, if he were honest and upright, brave and scrupulous. I could be proud of him still, though we shared no common taste or hobby. You think,' he said, a little more softly, seeing her distress, 'that I am harsh and unsympathetic, but is it no wound to my soul to see Margaret's first-born scattering seed which must needs bring forth tares? As the boy sows, the man must reap.'

'Ah,' said granny, 'but the good God gives us many a chance to weed our fields between the spring seed and the autumn sheaves! And shall we show ourselves less patient? Dear James, bear with the boy; he is but a laddie yet, our Francie, and the very graces of his nature are at the same time its defects. Ask the women, ask the youngest girl in the kitchen whom she most willingly serves, and you will hear that it is Master Frank!'

'I see no display of this graciousness towards his sister.'

'Ah, Cynthy, dear Cynthy!' said granny, with a smile, 'she is of those born to be ruled! I think many women are happier so!'

'But do they make better men of us?' he asked sadly; 'or do you women, who are such liberal givers, teach the thoughtless among us to take as a right what is only ours by grace? Well, well, you have looked deeper into life than I, and with purer eyes, and if you see a better hope for my poor boy's future, how can I but be glad? School has done nothing to rouse his ambition or stimulate his conscience. Perhaps private teaching would answer better. I must think it over.'

'Take him into your confidence,' said granny pleadingly; 'be friend and comrade as well as father. Oh, my dear, a little love, a little trust, go such a long way in helping the weakest to be brave! And if you lose heart about him, how can he have the courage to amend?'

But when natures are so opposed as in the case of this father and son, it is difficult to find a common ground for the meeting of affection. Frank, who could coax anything out of Lady Considine; whom the maids flew to serve; who made up, even to Cynthia, for some secret aches by the impulsiveness of his penitence; was sheepish and awkward with his father, and often, with a shrinking desire to evade correction, disingenuous. If Sir James had been told that he made his boy untruthful, he would have been cut to the quick, but strong natures, in their large scorn of insincerity, often drive weak ones into the very fault against which their whole

speech and manner is a protest. Frank never forgot the day his father found him out in his first deceit, or the scorching bitterness of his reproof. It shut up the boy's heart, which a little love might have touched to good issues, and ever after, in the sarcastic inflection of his father's tones, he seemed to read a reminder of that black experience.

'He doesn't trust me,' the boy said to himself despondently; and our good intentions, as we all know, have small chance of flourishing, unless others, as well as ourselves, have a little wholesome belief in them.

Even granny's gentle influence might have failed to create a better understanding, but for a broken leg which befell Frank at the beginning of the Easter holidays, and kept him a prisoner long after they were over.

In the general consternation of the household, it was quite forgotten that Frank's injuries, which were complicated and rather serious, were incurred in climbing the deciduous cypress, the one forbidden tree in the Fordedge grounds. It was a splendid specimen, a pyramid of tender, feathery green, and Sir James would allow of no risk to its symmetry; but even he quite overlooked the offence in his concern at the accident. Frank, as it happened, was carried by Peter, the under-gardener, to the master's study, the glass doors of which stood open to the lawn, and laid there upon the Chesterfield

sofa, while one distracted servant flew for the doctor, and the others, huddled together in the passage, wrung their hands, the women crying and un-animously prophesying that 'Master Frank had met his death!'

Cynthia—who, after a faint remonstrance, which was just so much breath wasted, had stood to watch Francie's feat among the green branches, and almost in the same instant that she heard his triumphant shout realised the import of that sickening thud upon the turf—kept a wonderfully steady head upon her slender shoulders. Though the tears would fall, it was she and not the ejaculating Jane who helped nursie to make his bed and fill the kettles, who ran to the cedar chest for the oldest sheets to tear up for bandages, and had a hand in all those preparations which people who pride themselves upon their sensibility consider heartless, and people of common-sense recognise for truest service.

But when the surgeon had probed and strapped and bandaged, it was not considered wise for the moment to remove the patient, and thus Francie came to have a prescriptive right to the library, the room of all others he would have avoided. Yet when he became sufficiently conscious to realise where he was, he was aware of some subtle difference that made the room seem no longer a place of humiliation and dread. That dark, silent figure that watched with him through the first nights of

bewildering pain was surely his father? He could not, perhaps, guess at the deeps of tenderness that underlay that father's cold manner, but something of the child's feeling of being cared for and sheltered came back to him.

'You lift me so comfortably,' he said once; and Sir James's heart gave a throb of melancholy gladness for even so slight a sign as this that Francie's own was not wholly estranged.

'I'm afraid I can't help hurting you,' he said, 'but you've been very plucky. You've proved that you can bear physical pain with a fortitude many a man might envy.'

'And Sir Simon said he was proud of you!' burst out Cynthia, who sat cross-legged on the floor beside the sofa. 'He's a real "Poor thing Hero," isn't he, father?'

Francie's pale face flushed crimson.

'Father doesn't know it was—the cypress,' he said faintly, when he and Cynthia were alone for a moment. 'When he hears, he won't say I'm brave!'

'Father does know,' she answered him, 'and I heard him say to grandmamma this morning at breakfast that he supposed the very fact of being forbidden would have made him want to climb that tree when he was a boy. So you see he understands. I think father must have been a very nice kind of boy, don't you?'

'I daresay he was awfully good,' said Frank wearily.

‘Perhaps, but not too good, for he is pretty old, you see, and he has had a long time to grow better in.’

Even when Francie was well enough to be carried to his own room, it was to the library he went again, when convalescence had fairly set in. Nobody quite knew how it came about, but the Chesterfield was certainly the most comfortable sofa in the house, and Sir James declared almost eagerly that the young people did not disturb him. He found it strangely pleasant to hear their voices, as they whispered together, and Cynthia's low laugh often made him smile out of sheer sympathy behind his book. For Cynthia turned an unconcerned back upon her new girl-friend that she might devote herself entirely to Francie. She waited on him with the patience of an old woman and the activity of a young one. Like the little woman she was, she rejoiced that he was in her power, since she could spend herself the more on him. Sir James, with an eye of apparent absorption upon the page, listened, pondered, balanced anxiously the hints of character the children unconsciously revealed. All of a sudden, he seemed to realise how much they were to him—how closely knit up with his life. He turned to look at them, and here was Cynthia at his elbow, shyly offering the toffee she had made in the biscuit-tin lid to celebrate Francie's recovery.

‘It is a little like glue,’ she said candidly, ‘but it's awfully nice, if you haven't a loose tooth.’

Sir James was about to refuse, but changed his mind and accepted a sticky portion. 'May I keep it till to-morrow?' he asked politely. 'If I remember rightly, toffy doesn't promote conversation; and while you two are munching, I might find another use for my tongue. Would either of you care to hear the true history of that set of calf-bound volumes in the middle of the second shelf to the right? It is rather curious in its way.'

'Do tell us!' cried two voices in chorus, curiosity struggling with astonishment at a father seen under this new guise of story-teller. The tale he had to relate was curious, and he told it with so much quiet humour that his listeners were held spell-bound, and at the end paid him the greatest compliment a *raconteur* can look for, by clamouring for more!

Sir James laughed. 'Not to-day!' he said. 'I am highly flattered by your encore, but there's an easily reached limit to my inventive powers, and if you draw on them too largely, they'll be exhausted in a week. Besides, I have to meet Macmorran at Torbridge at four.'

'But it was a true story?' questioned Cynthia, her dark eyes searching his.

'Quite true.' He pinched her chin. 'You and Frank may look at that set of bound prints on the lowest shelf, if you'll be so good as to wash your

hands first, and put that sweetstuff safely beyond temptation's reach.'

It was with a greatly lightened heart he went that afternoon on his way back from Torbridge on his visit to Mrs. Chayne. He was glad to take that brighter face with him, especially glad afterwards that he had listened to her counsels of tenderness, for it was the last time in all her sweet and gentle life that granny was to intercede for Francie.

It was an exquisite evening in early April, the sun dipping and sending a flood of light across the landscape. He reined in his horse to look with feasted eye and listen with satisfied ear to Nature's delicious, confused melody, song and hum and rush of wing, and the infinite soft murmur of growing grass as an invisible wind stirred it, the dying chords of the day's great orchestra of praise.

'*Sanctus, sanctus Dominus Deus omnipotens, qui erat, et qui est, et qui venturus est,*' he murmured, his own soul touched with a solemn sense of exaltation, as if he too had a voice in Nature's evening hymn.

Granny was walking in the little garden she had wrested from the rock and made to blossom with beauty. He could see the white softness of her cap between the ranks of the fir-trees, and her bent head as she saluted each friendly, familiar flower. She went as lightly as drifted apple bloom, and her little black skirt never injured so much as a blade

of grass; but it struck him, with a pang, that she looked more fragile and spirit-like than ever. But the face she lifted to his was full of its own radiant content.

'My lilies have been waiting to bloom for Easter day,' she said. 'I always like to think that it was with lilies the green Valley of Humiliation was beautified; in that still place, where angels walked, they were indeed the only fitting flower, and I cannot help thinking that, when our soul's pilgrimage is over, and we "are free from the noise and from the hurryings of this life," it will be these fair blooms that we shall first recognise on the other side of the gate of paradise. "The foolish fancy of an old woman who walks in the twilight," you will say, but you remember—

"Thou hast a garden for us where to bide,
Fast in Thy paradise where no flower can wither."

Our dear Francie shall have those spikes to-morrow, to be his Easter greeting, but we shall not cut them to-night, for flowers, you know, are best gathered in the early morning.'

But in the brooding spring darkness, before the dew had blessed the lilies, the gentle angel of death had summoned granny to keep the great festival in the garden of God.

CHAPTER VII



RANNY'S death drew Cynthia and her father closer together than perhaps anything else could have done. Cynthia, indeed, was almost inconsolable, but her grief lost a little of its bitterness when she realised that he shared it. She never forgot the wonder of his goodness, nor how he had come late to her little room on that first sad night, when she had cried herself into a state of feverish misery that made sleep impossible. Jane had left the door open and the gas alight, that she might not be frightened, but the glare hurt her swelled eyes, and she could scarcely even reward Augustus with a pat, when, taking advantage of the open door, he sneaked in, jumped upon her bed and licked away her tears. For her little heart was nearly bursting with the thought that there was no one who would understand her sorrow except nursie, who was growing old too, and might be 'taken' any day, in answer to her frequent prayer. This was a grief into which Francie—with a boy's reticence,

and a boy's dislike of emotion—could not enter, and grandmamma—grandmamma was writing by the evening post for mourning patterns, and was divided between the merits of alpaca and merino!

'You should moderate your grief, my dear,' she said to the red-eyed Cynthia, who could eat no lunch. 'You must practise a little self-control. Your dear grandmother was an old woman: she could not, in the course of nature, have been spared long, and she died a painless death, and is much happier in heaven.'

Father did not talk so when he came in, in the dark. He fastened the top button of Cynthia's red flannel nightgown, which she had loosed in her choking grief, and drew her near him with an arm round her neck. As he put his own head down against her curly one, he whispered, 'You and I miss her, don't we?'

'Oh, father,' said Cynthia brokenly, 'did you love her as much as I did?'

'I think so, little daughter. I have known and loved her and looked up to her, and tried, I hope, in a far-off way sometimes to be like her—for a great many years—since the time when your mother was no older than you.'

'You knew mamma when she was little?' asked Cynthia wonderingly, her thoughts for a moment diverted.

'Yes, and I think it was because she was the

child of her mother that I first began to love her,' he spoke dreamily, as if to himself, 'though no one could know her long without discovering the many gracious and beautiful qualities that were all her own. And I had to lose her so soon!' He stopped abruptly, and, young as she was, Cynthia divined in some measure what that loss must still be to him, and what it must cost him to reveal himself as he did. She squeezed his arm, and burrowed her head a little closer, with unspoken sympathy.

'Father,' she asked presently, 'do you think granny will be too happy in heaven to care that we're missing her?'

'What put that thought into your head?' he asked abruptly.

Cynthia hesitated. 'Grandmamma said she was better off where she is, and—it was selfish to—cry.'

'I think you must have misunderstood your grandmother,' he said, feeling that respect must be maintained. 'It is selfish to grudge the rest and the joy of heaven to those who reach these before us, but our human affections and our individuality were meant to outlast the grave. Love is the greatest of all gifts, Cynthia, because it is the nearest to the heart of Christ, and yonder, I take it, as here, it will be the test of our likeness to Him. They are not lost! They are waiting for us, every one!'

'He is thinking of mother!' divined the child, awed and wondering at his far-away, longing look.

He roused himself presently, and talked to her quite cheerfully, telling her much about granny in her younger days, and something of her mother's girlhood, too; and when he tucked her up and left her she was so soothed and comforted that she almost immediately fell asleep. And on the next day, when she stood with him, her hand tightly clinging to his, and saw the ineffable peace on granny's face as she lay with the Easter lilies between her folded hands, it was not of death the divider she thought, but of the everlasting life that re-unites.

Deep into her consciousness sank the memory of that hour, and though in the after years the veil of his reserve was seldom lifted, she felt herself knit close to her father in a sympathy that needed no words.

The new bond was the more to both, in that Frank continued to be a disappointment, and did no better under a tutor than he had done at school, and that Cynthia's new-found friend, Kitty, was, much to her own bewailment, sent for half of each year to an ex-schoolmistress aunt in London, who volunteered to educate her.

Kitty came back faithfully with June and the roses, but winters are long when one is young, and it was a good thing to have a nice, understanding

father. It came to be an established custom that Cynthia should preside at five o'clock tea in the library. Lady Considine yielded so far to fashion as to offer the refreshment to visitors, but she thought tea-drinking a pernicious indulgence, and ruinous to the complexion. Cynthia was not of her mind, and gloried in ministering to her father.

'You don't mind about your complexion, do you, father? I don't, a bit, about mine, but I take only milk and water because I promised grandmamma. And you see, it lets me get away from Miss Armitage to pour out for you.'

'Is that your ambition in life, Cynthy?'

'I think it is,' said Cynthia, who was nothing if she was not truthful. 'And that was why granny was so glad when you gave me Whitefoot—because she couldn't run after him.'

'Who couldn't run after whom?' asked Sir James, bewildered.

Cynthia laughed. 'Miss Armitage, of course. She is rather fat, you know, and Whitefoot can go! And it isn't much good never to be alone except when you're asleep, because then you're not really yourself at all.'

Sir James put up his hand with a gesture of mock despair. 'My dear child, could you be persuaded to describe your grievance in a few words of plain English such as an unenlightened person

like myself can understand? Do you not like your governess?'

Cynthia pondered, anxious to be just.

'I think I should like her very much if she didn't teach me,' she said.

'Or perhaps if you would allow yourself to be taught, eh?'

There was just a little chagrin in his voice, for here was the old education question cropping up again, seemingly as unsolved as ever; and Cynthia, quick to catch his every tone, blushed and hung her head.

'I do try, daddy dear,' she said, 'but I seem never to get any further. It's like going round and round in a circle, when you're just mad to go in a straight line, and I do think I get vertigo, like Joel's old horse that turns the millstone, for I seem to get stupider and stupider and—and—it makes me cry in my bed to think how vexed you'll be when you find out that I don't know anything!'

The tears were not far off now—indeed, one plumped into Cynthia's saucer, and Sir James was softened at once.

'Come, come,' he said kindly, 'the matter isn't so hopeless as all that! You've a good while to make up arrears in yet. Suppose I constitute myself into an examining board, and sound those deeps of ignorance for which you've so considerately prepared me. But let me fortify myself with another cup of tea first.'

'It's a good thing it's strong,' said Cynthia, taking off the lid and peeping into the teapot, 'for you will be shocked!'

And he was, far more than he allowed her to suspect. Cynthia had been taken over a very wide range of subjects, but with so inaccurate a grasp of each that the result was simply astounding to the man who was by nature a student.

'I suppose you can play?' he asked, when the poverty of her conquered territory in English history, geography, and science had been revealed.

'Not—not to you,' said the poor child in a choked voice.

'German? Latin? French?'

Poor Cynthia essayed a few words in the latter tongue, and he had much ado not to put his hands to his ears.

'I suppose that was one of the branches Miss Armitage did not undertake to teach,' he said politely.

'I'm afraid it is my fault,' said Cynthia humbly. 'She has certificates. I've seen them. One of them says she speaks French like a native'—

'Of England,' said Sir James, with his grave smile. 'Well, Cynthia, it's very little good bemoaning the past; we must consider how we are to get a little knowledge into that empty pate of yours. Have you any ideas on the subject yourself?'

She had, and they came out with a rush.

'I would like to learn with you, daddy. No, I don't mean that I'd bother you by doing lessons here. But if you would set me a task, I would do it faithfully every day, I would indeed! I'm not afraid of lessons, and I won't shirk; and if I have the book I think I could understand. It's the explaining and explaining till you don't know what you're to forget and what you're to remember that drives me silly. And you've such heaps and heaps of books I've wanted to read ever since you let me take the narrow ribbons to make dolls' sashes.'

'Books enough, goosie, if you've brains enough; but have you reckoned with the kind of master you propose to give yourself?'

'I think you'll make a dear teacher,' said Cynthia, with a disarming hug.

'See you have a proper respect for me, then, or you will find your mistake!'

'We haven't begun yet. I may kiss you till we do begin.'

'What will your grandmother say to this revolutionary scheme?'

'I don't think grandmamma will mind,' said Cynthia consolingly. 'She was saying only yesterday it was a pity I was such an expense, since Francie is to go in the autumn to Sandhurst. I think she'll be glad.'

'I can't have you sacrificed to your brother,' said

Sir James shortly. 'I can look after your general education, but I can't tackle music and drawing, and we must see if you haven't any taste for these before I can allow you to give them up.'

The subject of Frank's entering the army was rather a sore one, and Sir James had yielded reluctantly to his son's wish and his mother's urgent arguments.

'I can't think why you object, James,' said Lady Considine; 'it's such a gentlemanly profession. Dear Francie takes the taste from my family; we were a race of soldiers.'

'We make our own destiny, mother. The lad will get nothing out of the army that he doesn't take there. I had rather he had been content to be a son of the soil, like his fathers before him.'

'Tut, tut! What is there for a lad of spirit to do down here in the dullest corner of England? He will make good friends. Nothing like that to help a young man on in life.'

Sir James was silent, but he was wise enough to know that a thwarted ambition sours all but the sweetest natures, and he was not without a faint hope that the discipline of a soldier's life might develop in Frank's character certain traits hitherto dormant. He had proved himself capable of physical endurance; perhaps moral courage, a plant of slower growth, might show new vigour in time.

It was some satisfaction that he succeeded in

passing the entrance examination, and Sir James expressed his pleasure, when Frank ran down for a day or two to Fordedge before going to Sandhurst. Cynthia and Kitty, whose advent happened about the same time, welcomed the young Gentleman Cadet with open arms, and were prepared to follow his career with the most flattering interest through its various stages of 'snooker,' 'intermediate,' and 'senior.' Kitty, so delightfully pretty herself, showed an open and innocent admiration for Frank's good looks, and was convinced that he had only to will it to pass from his present humble position as a G.C. to G.C.B. and a District Command.

'And when you've won ever so many battles, and the Queen, bless her! has made you a lord, won't I be proud to say, "It's me, Kitty Terry, that knew him before ever he buckled on his first sword!"'

Susceptible Frank laughed, but he blushed too.

'Kitty's a jolly little thing,' he said to Cynthia, 'and she's awfully pretty.'

'I knew you would think so,' said loyal Cynthia heartily. 'I don't think anybody could be prettier or nicer.'

But Kitty had the grace to leave brother and sister alone on the last evening of Frank's stay, and as they walked in the chill, grey garden, his memory and hers flowed together in one stream, and their common thoughts went sailing down it. There was a pathos in those fragments of an ended past which

they recalled together; the things they had done, and seen, and said as children, who were children no longer; and in that hour of gentle influences the old love woke and cried aloud.

When he had gone the next day, Cynthia went up to the old nursery, where nursie sat with the broken-nosed rocking-horse for company, and that gay pageantry of fabled story upon the walls about her.

'He is gone, nursie,' she said.

'God go with the bonnie bairn! I hope he'll mind to wear flannel next his skin, and never miss his prayers.'

Cynthia laid her head in that faithful lap, and together they cried a little and comforted each other.

But when Cynthia went down again to make her father's tea she closed the red baize door very softly behind her, for it seemed to her as if she were closing it upon her lost childhood.

CHAPTER VIII



RS. TERRY was an excellent and cultivated musician, and it was arranged that Cynthia should go daily to the rectory to have the benefit of her teaching, while the rector undertook to instruct both girls in the elements of drawing. They drove into Torbridge in Cynthia's governess-cart to buy the necessary materials. Fisher's shop was always a palace of delight to Cynthia, with its new books and pretty stationery and nicknacks, and she spent a long time, just for the love of it, in choosing paper and board, pencils and rubber, and the shining drawing-pins which look so professional.

‘I suppose we shall spoil a good deal?’ she said, looking doubtfully at the large parcel, a little sobered by the discovery that Kitty had to contribute a threepenny-piece and a farthing to make up the amount of the bill.

Kitty laughed.

‘I know how it will be,’ she said. ‘The dad will begin with immense energy, and just when we’re

being carried along on his enthusiasm, or carried away, more likely, someone will knock at the door and tell him he's wanted, and he'll tear off and never come back again, and we'll be left to struggle out of our mistakes alone! It's always so in our house. The only way to be sure of getting father or mother for five minutes to yourself, would be to chain them to the wall!

'Then I don't think we've bought too much paper,' said Cynthia thoughtfully, 'for experiments take a lot!'

Kitty's description turned out to be quite accurate, and it was rather trying to one of Cynthia's order-loving disposition to live in an atmosphere of continual unrest; to be expected to hustle books and work off the table in a twinkling, for the laying of a meal that might not be eaten for an hour; or to work cheerfully kneeling before a cane chair (which hurt your elbows dreadfully, if you leaned on it), or standing on tiptoe with your block on the mantelpiece; but there were other lessons involved in the discipline, as well as the making of an accurate outline.

'If you wait until you've everything comfortable and handy about you, girls, you'll never do much worth doing in life,' the rector would say cheerfully. 'Anyone can succeed when everything's made smooth for him!' But, though he was rather a breathless person, and kept you nervously in dread of his sudden entrances and exits, he always spared

a minute, even in his greatest hurry, to give clear instructions in a few well-chosen words; his mind being, indeed, in far better working order than his habits. Cynthia, who was rather slow and plodding, generally found that he returned in time to help her a little farther along the unknown road; while Kitty, who had all the family quickness and facility, flew down side-paths of her own choosing, and too often found them blind alleys!

'I do think the dad is right,' she said one day, watching Cynthia's slow, patient fingers; 'he says we're only getting the education of one average girl between us, and you're absorbing the biggest half!'

'Then it's because I need the most,' said Cynthia, with true modesty; 'but I do wonder how you can do so many things at once, Kitty, and not muddle them up in your mind!'

'Terry ways!' said Kitty. 'If you were a Terry, you'd know.'

'If I were a Terry, I wonder if I'd be as sweet-tempered?' thought Cynthia; for the way in which each member of the little household bore with the shortcomings of the others was a lesson in good manners and family forbearance well worth observing. We can all be allowance-making for the faults that are not ours, but to see our own particular weakness reflected in another, and to suffer for it as we make others suffer, is somehow much more difficult to put up with!

But the Terrys endured each other's blunders with the most imperturbable good-humour ; waited hours for each other at meals, or sat down alone with equal cheerfulness to cold fragments ; missed each other unfailingly at appointments (for it was a Terry trait never to have a clock or watch that went right), and turned up smilingly after no matter how long a detention ; misappropriated each other's possessions, muddled each other's drawers and wardrobes ; and, in short, did all that was possible to aggravate each other without ever once succeeding ! And in the middle of it all they accomplished an amount of work, and really good work, amazing to those who believe in doing one thing at a time, and giving it your undivided attention ; but if that also was a Terry 'way' which others could not hope to acquire, their bright and cheerful energy certainly stirred up the stagnant pool of life around them.

Cynthia, however, brought up under other traditions, and accustomed to the leisurely, dignified quiet of her father's life and talk, found Kitty's rushing visits to the schoolroom at Fordedge a serious drawback to study. After trying for a while to be as amiable as a Terry under interruption, and only succeeding in worrying her already over-sensitive conscience, she at last resolved to speak.

'Kitty dear,' she said, 'I'm not clever like you, and I can't learn my lessons by just looking at the

binding of the book; I'm a dreadful old plodder, but father makes things so interesting and takes such a lot of trouble, that I do want to get on. So I was thinking I'd do like an old gentleman I've read of somewhere, and put a wafer in the middle of my forehead when I am busy, and then, when you come to the schoolroom and see it there, you'll know that you're not to speak to me, not if you're just bursting to do it, until it is taken off.'

Kitty screamed with laughter, and waltzed Harum round the lawn.

'You shall have a wafer, too, Harum Terry,' she said. 'Scarum has got one already—a great big black one just above his nose—for you're a terribly frivolous boy, and perhaps it will help you to be serious. I think you should get one for poor old Augustus, too, Cynthy; one of the kind that you can't paw off, for he always looks so awfully bored when Harum and Scarum come to visit him! He reminds me of an old lady auntie that I go to see in town, who always asks us, the minute we get into the room, what omnibus we wish to catch, and if we're sure we've time to take a cup of tea! We never do have time in that house!'

'Why do you go at all, I wonder?'

'Oh, she has the date of our last visit down in a book, and she would be seriously offended if we were a day or two behind the right time. She's the

kind of person who likes to invite you on a visit to her house, and, when you go, always wishes you were away again.'

'I'm not that kind of person, Kitty. And it's only because'—

'I know, I know,' Kitty interrupted her, 'and I think it's a perfectly lovely idea; but if the Terry family adopted it, they'd have to be tattooed, they'd never be able to wash their faces at all! No, Harum, my dear, I'm afraid we're not good enough to wear wafers, for we'd be breaking our resolutions every five minutes!'

'Father laughs, and says one's resolutions oughtn't to be babes in swaddling clothes, needing outside support, but should be strong enough to stand on their own feet.'

'I never made one that grew up,' said laughing Kitty; 'mine all die of decline in infancy. They're awful weaklings, with no constitution!'

'It's just because I'm afraid I shouldn't keep to mine, either, that I think rules and regulations you've got to obey, even if you make them yourself, are a help. I don't mean silly and vulgar vows, such as wearing the same clothes till a siege you had nothing to do with was raised, or a battle you couldn't influence was fought, but I do think Sir Walter Manny, Queen Philippa's young page, may have found it a spur to his courage when he swore to wear a black patch over his eye till he had proved

himself a brave soldier, for if ever he was tempted to be a coward, that little sign would shame him.'

'I daresay it was very becoming!' said mischievous Kitty. 'Patches are very fetching in old pictures; much nicer than red wafers, Cynthia!'

'Well, I'm going to seal my forehead with a wafer,' said Cynthia stoutly. 'I'm going to Fisher's to get a box. And mind, you'll have to respect it, Kitty!'

'Oh, I'll respect it! I wonder how Frank would look with a little star of father's sticking-plaster above his left eyebrow! If it's a soldiery thing to do, he'll be sure to want to do it, and if I can hunt up the sticking-plaster I'll set him up with a stock this very night.'

'You'd better find the plaster first! You've only a week.'

'Oh, you'd wonder how things turn up if you only look in unlikely enough places!' said Kitty cheerfully. 'You tidy people make the mistake of looking for things where they ought to be. But that reminds me, Cynthia; if it's really only a week till Frank comes back, I wish you'd help me to clear out the workshop. It's in an appalling mess! I don't mind a scrap for Francie, but there's that Colquhoun boy he's bringing with him. Anybody with a name like that—three whole letters wasted—must be rather fearsome. People shouldn't set traps with their surnames.'

'If he's Francie's friend he must be nice.'

'What's his first name?'

'Archie.'

'H'm! that mends the matter a little. Archies are generally dear, good chaps; but, if he's the best that ever breathed, there's not an inch of room for him in the workshop till it's cleared.'

'I'll help you,' said Cynthia, with rather a resigned sigh. She knew that workshop! 'Tomorrow is father's Torbridge day—would it do if I came in the afternoon?'

'Capitally. Come to lunch, Cynthy. I can promise you something to eat, if we've to make a raid on the larder for it!'

Cynthia thought the Terry picnics rather fun, but she was expected to lunch with Lady Considine, with several yards of table-cloth and a great array of flowers and glasses and silver between them. Grandmamma, perhaps because she was so old, always made Cynthia feel as if she were in pinafores, and didn't know how to hold a spoon, and she always talked 'down,' improvingly.

'I trust, when your dear brother comes, Cynthia, that he will not have any cause to be ashamed of you before his friend,' she began with the pudding.

'I hope not,' said Cynthia, rather hotly.

'Ah,' said grandmamma, 'that is just what I feared! Always impetuous, Cynthia! Thomas,

you may put the sifted sugar on the table and leave the room. Frank is your senior by more than two years, and at his age young men begin to be very fastidious about the behaviour of their sisters. I *hope*'—but her tone belied her—'he will find you improved. Your manner to Francie's friend ought to blend politeness with reserve; but he will, of course, not expect to see much of a young girl who is still in the schoolroom. He is, I may tell you, a cadet of a very good house, with excellent prospects.'

Cynthia felt too helpless to respond. And only yesterday she had been rejoicing that the hay was so early, that they might have some fun among the cocks! She went rather dejectedly to the rectory, where the task that awaited her was certainly somewhat herculean. The workshop was in a glorious state of confusion; thither had wandered all the articles that could not be accommodated in the house, or that were waiting for repair. There, too, neglected hobbies found a refuge, until re-warmed enthusiasm took them up again.

'It *is* rather a disadvantage,' said Kitty, poking a finger exploringly into a jam-pot which had once held some pond specimens, 'to have to make one shed do as coal and bottle cellar and carpenter's shop and laboratory and attic; but, on the other hand, you do make such surprising discoveries of forgotten treasure! I've just found

father's dumb-bells that he made sure were left behind.'

The girls worked with a will, and presently Mrs. Terry came to them with two odd tumblers and a breakfast-cup, on a tray, and in her hand a rare old Venetian flask. 'It's only home-made lemonade, dears,' she said; 'but I'm sure all this dust must make you thirsty.'

'Oh, motherie, that's good!' cried Kitty. 'We could drink an ocean; but Cynthia declared we ought to act up to our wafers, even if we didn't put them on, and not let tea interrupt us till we had finished. But that meant going to the house, and washing and brushing, and all that. It ought to be different when lemonade comes to us, oughtn't it, Cynthia?'

The rector presently burst in, in search of his wife, but forgot what he came for, and sat swinging his legs from the carpenter's bench, and drinking turn about with Kitty out of the cup. Mrs. Terry had a packing-case to sit on, and a lump of coal for a footstool; the cushion Cynthia made for her back out of a bundle of shavings rather added to the litter, but they talked and laughed and told stories, till the rector suddenly became grave and absent-eyed, and said he must go back to his sermon. 'Search diligently,' he murmured as he went; 'search—till ye find it.'

And Cynthia wondered if it was his text he was

thinking of, and hoped it might be so, for his sermons were full of a plain and practical wisdom that made religion seem very real.

She was glad that with these kind friends, at least, she did not need to 'blend politeness with reserve'!

CHAPTER IX



RETURNING from the rectory, Cynthia met her father riding home from Torbridge. She was the first to perceive him, and it gave her pleasure to watch him unseen. Cynthia was very proud of her father; to her he was a king among men, tall and straight, with hair that had long since silvered, and eyes of a darker grey than her own. His face lightened pleasantly when he saw her, and at a second glance it expressed humour.

‘No need to ask where you have been, Cynthia!’

‘We’ve been cleaning the workshop,’ she blushed her apology; ‘the mess was awful!’

‘So I should imagine. You don’t look very like a young lady of fortune.’

‘Well, I’m not that, anyway,’ she rejoined, with cheerful content. ‘And I put on my rag-bag clothes on purpose, father.’

‘I wouldn’t be too sure about the fortune, Cynthia. Do you know where I’ve been? At the Bank, where I’ve been opening an account for you. Your

godmother, whom you never saw, but who was your mother's godmother also, has left you two hundred pounds. By her wish I have banked it in your name, as it is to be entirely at your own disposal.'

'Two hundred pounds,' said Cynthia, opening her eyes, 'and all for me! How queer, and how—kind! Isn't it an awful lot of money, father?'

'It isn't an illimitable sum,' he smiled, 'but I daresay Lady Branscombe thought it was enough to give you a little pleasure, and more than enough for you to waste.'

'Am I really to spend it—just as I like?'

'Absolutely. I shall not ask you what you have done with it, and I should prefer that you didn't even seek my advice. I'll initiate you into the mystery of cheque-drawing to-morrow. You are old enough to know the value of money, or at least to profit by your mistakes in learning it; so make your experiment, Cynthy—keep your fortune tied up in a stocking, or squander it in gratifying all your fads and fancies, as you will.'

'I don't think I'll do either,' she answered gravely. She was already planning in her own mind a thousand liberalities. Presents for everybody in the village; a new gown for Kitty, whose frocks were few and far between; the most splendid writing set for her father's table; the atlas which the rector, who was giving a course of Travel Talks in the schoolroom, had been sighing for. But this

exultingly beautiful vision of unlimited generosity was suddenly dashed by the remembrance that the thing which it would be nicest of all to do was now made impossible. It would have been so glorious to give Francie and his friend a royal time, with heaps of pocket-money, and lots of excursions and new fishing-rods and guns, and walking-sticks and golf-clubs, and all the things the heart of a boy can covet. But Mr. Colquhoun wasn't a boy, seemingly, but a grown-up man who must be treated respectfully, and who would laugh, and make Francie laugh too, if she suggested any of these things. Ah, it took the glitter off Lady Branscombe's golden pile—for it was still of Francie Cynthia thought most, and a pleasure was twice a pleasure if he shared it.

However, nothing in this life turns out quite as we expect it, and sometimes things rise above our anticipations, instead of falling below them.

When Cynthia, dressed in a new cream surah, without any touch of colour, and with her curly dark hair turned up, went down to the drawing-room, hoping faintly that she looked a little grown-up, but feeling wretchedly schoolgirlish, a surprise awaited her. She had not heard the dogcart draw up, and yet, there already, standing on the hearth-rug, with grandmamma in the large brocade easy-chair, presiding over the conversation, were Francie and his friend.

Francie gave her quite a cordial kiss, and exclaimed with approval: 'Why, Cynthia, how you've grown! Here's Colquhoun. Colquhoun, this is my sister.'

And behold, instead of the stiff young Scotchman, who was to look upon her from the height of his 'prospects' and his superior experiences, here was a boy, scarcely any taller than herself, and even more shy. For he actually blushed when he shook hands, and failed altogether to find any words. Instantly, with that sense of protection women feel for the helpless male creature, Cynthia knew their positions to be reversed. It was she who now looked down, not with patronage, but with motherly desire to be good to him and put him at his ease. He had a round, boyish face, brown and freckled, sandy hair, and no features worth regarding except a good brow and a pair of steady, bright blue eyes that bespoke a nature candid and sincere. He made an excellent foil to Frank Considine, who had grown into a splendid youth, graceful and beautiful as a young Greek, and the new frankness of his manner and openness of his expression were balm to his father's heart. Father and son met amicably. For once Sir James was almost inclined to agree with his mother when she remarked—the young men having gone to dress—

'Nothing like the army for turning out gentlemen!'

'He's rather an Apollo, Master Frank, isn't he, Cynthia?' he said, pinching her chin playfully. 'You'll have to look after his diffident friend.'

'And I was afraid of him!' she flashed a laughing look at him.

'Scotchmen are all bashful,' said Lady Considine oracularly, 'but he comes of a good stock. Wait till he has been a few days with me, and see how he will come out!'

Young Colquhoun, however, showed a perhaps natural preference for Cynthia's society. Cynthia, in everyday frocks which she was out-growing, and with hair that would not always stay up, was not a formidable person, and he won her lasting favour on the very first night, by his openly expressed admiration of all Frank did, thought, and said.

'He's your hero, isn't he?' she said confidentially. 'He's always been mine!'

Colquhoun laughed and reddened.

'Do people have heroes nowadays?' he asked. 'I know that none of our chaps can come near him. He can do things awfully well, you know; better than anybody, if he likes.'

Frank's praise of his friend pleased Cynthia equally well, since it described just the sort of worshipper a hero ought to have.

'He's a very decent fellow, never in the way, and always ready to do things for you, you know. We chummed at once. He was awfully glad to be

asked down here, for he knows scarcely anybody in England.'

They were strolling in the garden, Cynthia hanging on her brother's arm, and quite unmindful of the dew that penetrated thin shoes. She had been eagerly pouring out to him the wonderful history of her legacy, and made him laugh by describing her despair when she realised that he might not be willing to share it.

'Why, Cynthy, you might know me better! Did you ever know me anything but hard up? I wanted awfully to bring you a present, but though the governor is very liberal, somehow I've never a stiver to bless myself with!' His brow clouded for a moment, but cleared again speedily.

She thanked him as gratefully as if his vague intention had taken a handsome shape, and whispered shyly that all she had was *nis*, to dip into when he would; but some gracious sense of shame made him say strongly—

'No, Cynthy, don't tempt me. I can scrape along, and I sha'n't touch your little hoard. But if you can make things go smoothly while Colquhoun's here, I'll be glad. He's even harder up than I am, for his old curmudgeon of a guardian up in Scotland keeps an awfully tight rein over him. He can't do him out of his own, of course, when he comes of age, but he thinks it good discipline to keep him short in the meantime. And there couldn't

well be a bigger mistake, for of course one must do as other fellows do, or be looked on as an outsider. But somehow,' he ended carelessly, 'I don't fancy Archie minds it so much as—I do.'

'I shouldn't think he minded anything much,' said Cynthia impartially; 'he looks very good-natured; but then I daresay he isn't popular, and able to do everything best, like you, Francie.'

'Oh, come!' said the boy, with the awkward laugh of gratified vanity, 'I don't know about best! He'll come out a long way ahead of me at the exams., you'll see. But he *is* a good sort, and I want him to have a jolly time.'

'I don't see why he shouldn't!' said Cynthia, who thought the world contained no more delightful spot than this sweet home among the Devon hills. 'Come and see the new tennis-lawn, Francie; it isn't too dark yet. We've been having it rolled every day, to be ready for you.'

But his interest was rather forced. 'It seems all right,' he said. Then, abruptly, 'You see, Cynthy, I somehow never hit it off with father'—

She looked up at him startled, a faint, vague uneasiness, that was scarcely as yet a pain, possessing her.

'He's such a dear, good daddy!' she said wistfully.

'Oh, of course!' he said impatiently, tearing off a handful of leaves from a walnut-tree by which they

stood, and scattering them to make a breath of pungent sweetness in the night. 'You're bound to say that because you're a girl, and girls never understand.'

From her earliest childhood that accusation was familiar in Cynthia's ears; but it had never pained her before. She used to believe hopefully that she would one day be a boy, if she was good; and when that dream dispersed, she was only sorry that girls weren't made as nice as boys. Now, in her budding womanhood, she felt the injustice of the taunt; it was he who failed to understand the depths of her sympathy and love.

She tried presently, with sweet cheerfulness, to speak of indifferent things; but Francie was cross, and said it was time to go in.

Day, breaking with glorious promise, mended the ills of night, and Francie came downstairs good-humoured and willing to be graciously pleased with his sister's devotion. Cynthia had already taken Colquhoun to the stables, to make acquaintance with the horses and dogs, and felt herself abundantly rewarded when Francie put an arm round her neck as they stood in the verandah discussing the day's plans.

'But where's Kitty?' he asked. 'We must have Kitty. Three's trumpery, you know, Cynthy.'

'Who is Kitty?' asked Colquhoun.

'Kitty is'—began Frank, and paused, for this

little maid of many fascinations was not easily described in a word.

'Kitty's just—Kitty,' amended Cynthia. 'If you cooe, she'll hear you, Francie. You'd better not go to the rectory, for this is washing-day.'

'I say, here she is!' cried Frank; and there indeed she was, flying light-footed up the terrace-steps in her faded blue cotton, her sailor hat at the back of her head, and her eyes dancing. She made them a demure curtsy.

'I was just dying to come,' she said, 'but it isn't manners to go till you're invited, so I hid behind the Portugal laurel, and I would have cooe'd back, but Lady Considine was sitting, like Sister Anne, at her window, and I was afraid she would think me just—daft!'

The word, the look, and the smile were for Archie Colquhoun, but it was Francie who said laughingly—

'You've lost your character in that quarter long ago, Kitty; one offence more wouldn't have mattered.'

'Has she been saying I'm not good company for Cynthia?' she asked, with a hint of real anxiety.

'Kitty, what nonsense have you got in your head?' cried her friend.

'No; it's my morals she's afraid you'll corrupt,' Francie teased.

'Well,' she retorted shrewdly, 'if I were you, I wouldn't have the kind that a girl's word could

change. And, if you're afraid, you needn't speak to me !'

But, as if to show how superior he was to all such fears, in all their expeditions he was Kitty's companion. Cynthia sometimes looked at them rather enviously, as they rode in front, laughing and chaffing each other, or took sides at tennis; but she had no bad comrade in Archie Colquhoun. They proved to have a good many tastes in common; a great weakness for four-legged 'beasts,' from Cynthia's old pony (Augustus, alas! was no more) to the humid-eyed red Devon cattle and the black pigs; a mutual interest in natural history, and an undying enthusiasm for 'collections' and 'fads,' which kept them busy grubbing and poking and 'messaging' (as grandmamma would have said, had it been any but young Colquhoun of Colquhoun who carried the old fish-kettle and sardine-tin for 'specimens'), and often took them out into the dusk as mighty hunters after moths.

There was something at once simple and staid about him that answered a chord in Cynthia's own nature, and, without any analysis on her part, she felt that she liked and trusted him.

A gift of a blue Skye which he made her cemented their friendship, and when a visit which had been quite successful in every way came to an end, she felt that she knew him well enough to say—not knowing that she betrayed any anxiety in saying it—

‘You’ll take care of Francie, won’t you?’

Colquhoun took her hand with that grip of his own which Scotch people use (it is quite different from an English handshake), but even before his stammering lips, in a sudden access of shyness, could say ‘Yes,’ his steadfast blue eyes had given the promise.

And Cynthia never dreamed then, nor for long years after, that, boy as he was, he had registered a vow which he meant to keep.

CHAPTER X



RANK'S friend and fellow 'intermediate' at the R.M.C., having proved himself a general favourite, before long became a frequent visitor at Fordedge.

'He'm a right gert man, wi' a rare singleness o' purpose,' was the village verdict, and Sir James echoed it with a smothered sigh. A strong grip, a steady aim, were indeed the main characteristics of Colquhoun's character; but if he had a fair share of the Scotch dourness which never loses hold of a cherished goal, his ideals were at least all lifted above life's lower levels.

'I am glad my son should have such a friend,' Sir James said more than once in the company of others, and oftentimes to himself in the solitude of his study, where his face might relax and, unrebuked, fall into lines of a rather dreary sadness. Perhaps it was not for the father, wilfully blind to all but hope, to tell himself that friendship rarely meets its exact equivalent in generosity, but if—as Colquhoun would have said—faithfulness is a matter of tempera-

ment, charm is a no less potent gift. From those who possess it how little is exacted! How much the little that they give is prized! What a debt of waywardness, pique, offence, may be wiped out by the sudden magic of a smile!

Very soon it was 'the boys' of whom Cynthia and Kitty talked, for whose return they prepared; and by those imperceptible degrees with which acquaintance slides into intimacy, they woke one day to leave formality behind them, and adopt the new-comer as 'Archie.' The boys had a ten days' break at Easter, and enlivened the summer, coming in time for the first meet of the otter hounds, and for such small open-air festivities as Lady Considine permitted to an unemancipated granddaughter, and staying till the coverts were ready to be shot over. But Cynthia did not yearn for grown-up gaieties; she was a capital walker, as well as a good horse-woman, and preferred strong boots and scrambles, or a race across the moors on her sturdy Exmoor pony, to any garden or tennis party the county had to offer. She lived almost entirely in the open air in summer, and was growing tall, and straight, and comely; perhaps it was this last circumstance that silenced remonstrance on grandmamma's part, since that Cynthia should grow good-looking was an unexpected grace. In winter she and her father—for he was rather indolent, and disliked unnecessary exertion—curled themselves like two squirrels in a

hollow oak, and cracked the nuts of knowledge to their hearts' content.

'I don't suppose I've been educated like other girls,' she said to Archie, 'and I daresay they know heaps that I don't, but there isn't any girl that has a nicer kind of life, or a dearer father, or a prettier home.'

'I'm sure there isn't,' he agreed, 'except that I think you should go out more in the winter, Cynthy; it must feel so stuffy in the hot rooms, and here, where the climate is so mild, you might begin that bark collection.'

'I'd like to, but I can't.' She shook her head. 'It's our hibernating time, only we don't sleep, you know; we just curl up in our chairs and read, and read, and read! It's lovely on the wet days when nobody comes bothering to call, and then, when it gets too dark to see the page even by firelight, we have such talks! This winter we're to have a box from Mudie's; father is to choose eleven of the books and I'm to choose the twelfth, and I've bargained that it's to be a novel. Father says all the novels have been written, but I tell him as he read the authors of his generation it's only fair I should know something about those of mine. Kitty, who has worked steadily through two circulating libraries since she went to town, says she finds herself quite out of touch with Miss Austen!'

'Well, I never read anything she wrote,' said

Colquhoun simply. 'I like Sir Walter, or a good adventure story, but somehow when you're swotting for an exam., you've no time for much more. I was wondering, Cynthy, whether, on a wet day—it does rain an awful lot in Devon, and you can't read from morning till night—you couldn't spare five or ten minutes now and then to write a bit'—

'Write—what?'

'A letter. I meant'—he stammered—'a note.'

'Why,' she said, with a laugh of wonder, 'I'm always writing! I write reams to Francie, though I daresay he skips the half! You should hear Mrs. Terry—she declares I can't help meddling with everything that belongs to him, from his collars to his morals!'

'But it was my collars and morals I was thinking of,' said Colquhoun, with twinkling eyes, 'and I shouldn't call it "meddling."'

'You want me to write to you?' she asked frankly. 'Of course I will! But I fancied Francie told you everything, and I'm sure I send you lots of messages.'

'I'd rather have them direct!'

'Oh, well,' she said, with a laugh, 'you'll have an envelope all to yourself; I suppose, like the children, you wouldn't consider it a letter at all if I put a special bit inside Francie's?'

'No,' he laughed too. 'I like to be considered worthy of a postage stamp, perhaps because I have

so few correspondents. Scarcely anybody but my old guardian, and his letters are mostly medicinal—without the jam.'

So it came about that Cynthia had a new confidant. She had a ready pen, and never found any difficulty in filling up a sheet to the friend as well as three or four to the brother. They were, upon both sides, the most innocent communications in the world, and Sir James might have read them every word, though, with his fine scrupulosity, he declined, at Lady Considine's suggestion, to do so.

'If I couldn't trust them,' he said, 'nothing that I might say or do would be likely to influence them.'

'You have brought Cynthia up very oddly, James; when Mrs. Talbot heard that she and young Colquhoun were corresponding, she was horrified. "My dear," she said, "you can never tell what it may lead to!"'

'I hope it will lead to some improvement in young Colquhoun's diction!' said Sir James lightly. 'He is a fine, steady lad, but he writes an atrocious note. I never could see, for my part, why a soldier should not wield his pen with the same dexterity as his sword, and there is no teacher like practice.'

'Really, my dear, if Cynthia weren't so very young, I should be inclined to agree with Mrs. Talbot.'

'You have not yet told me what it is that Mrs.

Talbot fears; but if my guesses do not wrong her, then I have some reason to congratulate myself on the "oddness" of Cynthia's training, for I hope it has at least made her natural and unaffected and modest, and has inspired her with a little common-sense! If the system Mrs. Talbot has pursued with her own daughters has led her to think that a young girl on the very threshold of her womanhood must needs see in every boy she comes across a subject for a vulgar flirtation or a silly romance, all I can say is, it must be gravely at fault.'

'Why, James, the Talbot girls are models!'

'No thanks to their mother, then,' he said grimly.

So Cynthia continued to send her little chronicle about the home doings and the horses and dogs and live-stock generally, and the rector's old and new hobbies, which she usually took up at the point where he left them off. She wrote conscientiously every Saturday after she had made up her accounts, and pursued the last farthing of her charity money to its legitimate home, and before she gave herself the reward of 'doing' the library flowers. At first she scanned Archie's answering scrawls with very moderate interest; but when she found she could rely on him for news of Francie, often attainable in no other way, his value as a scribe was greatly increased in her eyes. For Frank was fickle and wayward in his correspondence, as in all else; frequently a meagre post-card gave the information

that he was 'all right' and would write 'next week.' But too often next week became next month, and that in turn the month after, until, implored by Cynthia and goaded by Archie, he would dash off sheets full of fun and nonsense, and gay spirits and love, which Cynthia hugged and laughed over, and read and re-read until she knew each sentence by heart. All the household must share her happiness on the red-letter day which brought such a treasure; but the first to be privileged, even before her father, was the nurse, now grown old, to whom Francie was still the child she had cradled in her arms.

'It's a wonderful fine scholar he is, Miss Cynthia,' she would say. 'His letter might be print that you pay good money for. Your mother was like that, my dearie; you would think it was play-acting to see her dancing and laughing and saying things that would never get into my head, not if you was to open it to put them in—fancies and suchlike that came dear knows from where. "That little brain will work to better purpose some day," my old mistress would say; but if it was books she meant, Miss Margaret died too young, poor lamb, to write them. And here's Master Francie with the same turn, that you would almost think she was running on in the old merry way.'

'I think he must be like mamma in every way,' said Cynthia, without a touch of envy.

'He's got her yellow hair, and her eyes, and her

smile that came as sudden-like as the sun after April rain ; but never you mind, Miss Cynthia dearie, grey eyes is just as good for seeing to the deeps of things as blue ones, and there's many that fancies black hair best. And for keeping in curl, rain or shine, give it me, I say. You never had rag to your little head yet, and the trouble I had with Master Francie's wave—what with a wet brush, and Jane holding him for screaming, and your grand-mamma waiting for you both to show off to visitors—is past all telling ! And the aggravatingest thing was, that no sooner was he asleep on his pillow than into rings it would go of itself all over his blessed head !'

Cynthia laughed.

'I'll tell him, nursie ! It's good for him to remind him of the naughty boy he was !'

'Well, Miss Cynthia,' said nursie indulgently, 'I make no doubt you can write a pretty letter too, though you wouldn't be putting such foolishness in it ! You and the young gentleman, Mr. Archibald, that came himself to take a dish of tea with me—and the scones burned, which was cook's doing—are just the same ; it's "tell me what they did when they were children, Mrs. Bruce," says he, and sets my old tongue wagging. You're not a drop's blood to him, Miss Cynthia, him being Scotch, as my lady telled me—and a different breed they are, as I should know, whose husband came from those parts

too—but it's brother and sister you might have been.'

'I'd rather have Francie, thank you, nursie,' she smiled her amusement.

'And I'm not wishful you should have any other, my lamb, and I was meaning no ill; but there's people that come into the world with the same natures, if they should be born at the two ends of the earth and never come nearer, and it's that way with you and him—if I may make so bold. You're the quiet sort that likes to sit and listen, and when you get up it's to go away and do somebody's work that wouldn't be done by theirselves. It takes both kinds, Master Francie's and yours, Miss Cynthia, to sweeten the world, and it's not for the likes of me to be saying which does it the best; but it would be poor work if we was all wanting to be kings and queens, and nobody to do the odd jobs, as you might say; so don't you go thinking, my pretty, that there's no place for you when Master Francie comes by, for the highest in the land would soon come tumbling down if they hadn't them that's lower to lean on.'

Cynthia laid her cheek with a mute caress against nursie's work-worn hand. Since granny died there was no one else who understood so well as she the girl's staunch loyalty to her brother, and the defeating sense of her own inferiority which sometimes assailed her in secret. Her nature was without so

much as a smirch of jealousy; but she would have liked to be pretty and clever and gay, to be more upon his level. If she gave a thought at all to nursie's comparison of herself and Archie Colquhoun, it was only to tell herself that he was no more proof against Francie's charm and fascination than anybody else, as why should he be? Nobody would ever discover kingly qualities in poor Archie!

Nevertheless, it was this faithful henchman who was the first to send the news of Frank's success at the third examination, which passed that young 'G.C.' out of Sandhurst. It was true that his name was the last but one upon the list, while Colquhoun's topped it; but of this or of the Sword of Honour which also fell to the young Scotchman, nothing was said in the telegram, which ended with 'hurrah,' and was signed 'Archie.'

Cynthia claimed the orange envelope, waving it like a flag of truce as she flew with it to the rectory, where the warm-hearted husband and wife joined their rejoicings to her own, and Mrs. Terry instantly sat down to pass on the news to Kitty. It was a day of great happiness all round, Sir James not disguising his satisfaction. Even when the official list came out, and Frank's position in it was revealed, he only lifted his eyebrows whimsically.

'Out of sixty young gentlemen there is one greater dunce than my son, I see!'

'Really, James,' said Lady Considine, 'one would

think you take pleasure in disparaging your own child! What would you have thought, had *I* spoken so of you?’

‘I daresay you could with much truth, mother. My only hope of my children’s future lies in looking back at my own past.’

‘And what, pray,’ she continued majestically, ‘has an examination to do with a man’s courage?’

‘Not much, truly,’ he answered lightly, ‘except to daunt it. But you are right, mother. Many a right good soldier has made no great figure at his qualifying examination. But if Colquhoun should be gazetted to the same regiment, this may make all the difference to Frank, when the command of his battalion falls vacant.’

But nursie was of Cynthia’s opinion, and Cynthia hugged her for it.

‘I’m not book-learnt,’ she said; ‘but I’m thinking they’ll be putting Mr. Archibald up yonder just to give him some heart like, for anybody with two eyes in his head can see—and meaning no offence—that it would take six of him to make one soldier like our Master Francie!’

CHAPTER XI



HE friends, after a delay of two months, were gazetted to the same regiment, for the moment stationed at Aldershot, but destined in a year or two for foreign service ; and a spirit of great content fell upon the master of Fordedge. Himself a man of peace and of studious ways, he was glad that his son should have a taste of life's more stirring side, since some natures ripen best under stress. There were festivities upon Frank's twenty-first birthday, when Cynthia, in her first ball-dress, was allowed to have an unauthorised peep at the world. But they meant more to the father's soothed and gratified heart than the celebration of Frank's entrance into manhood ; for surely this gay and gallant son had come into his moral inheritance too !

Afterwards, when she knew and understood more, Cynthia counted it among the things for which she lifted up thanks, that the first sharp edge of disappointment should fall upon her alone. If it filled her heart with light that was a blinding pain, yet,

reading it in this illumination, she found her love but widened and deepened, because of that strange element of protecting pity that must evermore be intertwined with it.

In the early part of the year Sir James made what was now a mere annual visit to town. The days when any pretext was excuse enough to run up were long over. Since his wife's death he had shunned society, and only a desire to see the May picture shows and pick up new books and old ones drew him from his peaceful retirement. Cynthia missed him, and would have felt the blank the more if it had not been the springtime, when all the world was rippling with colour and ringing with song, and to be out of doors was the imperative duty of every young thing that could laugh and run and keep foot with fleet Nature, so busy summoning her green hosts from the under-world. Every hour spent within walls was irksome; when without, spring's light flying prints left an embroidery of bud and leaf and starry blossom, and through a haze of greening twigs came in full-throated chorus the nesting song of birds. Dinner—an affair of many courses, with the lamps lit and the curtains drawn upon the soft dusk, and grandmamma spinning out the meal with her habitual dignity and deliberation—was a trial of patience to Cynthia, who had something of the lawlessness of the season in her veins, and would dearly have loved to snatch a crust of

bread and cheese to eat under the sunset. But, happily for her, grandmamma's age demanded a post-prandial nap, and when she was settled in the brocade arm-chair by the newly-lighted drawing-room fire, and had quite given up pretending that she was awake and 'only shutting her eyes,' Cynthia was at last free to escape.

The night breathed the softest peace, with a stillness to charm and soothe, broken only by the drowsy flutter or murmur of some resting thing. The moon was rising and making a silver tissue of the mists in the meadows; in the west there was still a faint gleam of departed sunlight. Cynthia paced, aimlessly content, for an hour between the garden beds, sweet with the scent of rich earth and the night incense of flowers, then turned her steps to the little wood. Glades of beech and oak filled the valley and climbed the hill, mounting to the moorland beyond, which was still her father's land; but the little fir-wood led nowhere but to granny's empty house. It had seemed a vast place to her childhood's eye, but she knew it now for a mere patch, with that one path traversing it which she had herself called the Peace Way. Everywhere else in its narrow kingdom the trees herded together, striving towards the light, but here they stood apart, pilgrims straggling eastwards, cowed monks in a procession, soldiers guarding the little house where nothing was left alive but beautiful memories. In

the now clear moonlight what sharp black shadows they threw, each tree projecting its own ghost across the path! In and out of that checker of silver and dark she went, now looking, with a smile, for some remembered grave, now thinking, with a better understanding of her nature's hidden music, of the dear granny her little feet had so often hastened to seek. When the fragrance of the white lilac by granny's gate reached her, she stopped at the edge of the open to look up and see if the jealous moon had left any stars a chance to twinkle. Her throat, round and firm, was bare, but she was too hardy a creature to dread the night air. With the folds of her white dress flowing about her, she looked to a hidden spectator like a thing compact of moonshine.

Suddenly across the night's brooding silence came a note or two of clear but tremulous whistling. She started, and looked about her with wonder and vague alarm. 'Francie!' she said doubtfully; and when Francie indeed came out from the shadow of the little house, she ran to him with a cry that was all joy.

'Oh,' she cried, 'I was sure it was your own particular signal, but it seemed so strange to hear it here! Did you mean it for a surprise, dear boy? If you did, you couldn't have planned a nicer one, for grandmamma and I are all alone.'

He drew a quick breath. He had not spoken

yet; and with her arms about him she scarcely noticed that he almost held back from her caress.

'Is my father away?' he asked in an eager, constrained voice. 'I didn't see any lights in the library; but I thought he might be—dining out.'

'He's in town. He meant to run down to Aldershot to see you.'

Frank gave a smothered groan. And now at last she began to realise that there was something strange in his manner; and was it only the moonlight that made him look so pale?

'Are you ill, dear?' she asked, fear knocking at her heart. 'Why didn't you let us send for you? Where is your luggage?'

'Hush,' he said almost roughly—'don't talk so loud! You'll have everybody coming out to see what the row is. Come here into the summer-house. I have something to say to you.'

She was so shaken and afraid that she let him lead her unresisting through the tangled growth of the dewy garden to the summer-house where she had learned her alphabet at granny's knee. The ivy, for years unpruned, grew so thick over the door that he had to push it aside for her to enter, and when it fell again it made deep night of the little refuge. He groped for the rustic seat and pushed her gently enough down on it, and for a few minutes there was a silence that



'Are you ill, dear?' she asked.



seemed to Cynthia to have the pain of half a lifetime in it.

'Tell me!' she cried at last imploringly, and turned to him where a stray moonbeam revealed him as he stood against the door-post. 'Francie, I can't bear it; you are making me fear—I don't know what!'

'I'm in a dreadful mess,' he burst out, with sulky despair. 'I came down here to see you, and I've been hanging about for the last hour, on the chance that you might come this way alone. If not, I meant to creep up to the house when it was dark, and throw a pebble up at your window.'

'I'm glad I came,' she said, still bewildered, 'for—for that would have seemed stranger still.'

'Well, I had to take the risk of frightening you,' he said doggedly, 'and you're not one of the kind to cry out for nothing. The short and the long of it is, Cynthy, that I must have money, and I must have it to-night!'

'Money! Is that all?' She expired a great sigh of relief. 'But if you had written to father'—

'All!' he echoed fiercely. 'Why do you madden me by going on as if you didn't understand? You force me to explain what I'd have spared you if I could. I must have this money, or I shall be disgraced. If—if the thing gets about, I'll be cashiered.' He half whispered the words, hissing them through his teeth, with an ear alert for every

outside sound, if it was only the flutter of a leaf. 'Now you know what chance I'd have if I went to father! He might stump up to—to save the name, but'—his voice softened—'it would break his heart!'

'Yes,' she assented, and her own seemed to crack its strings; and then, with dry lips that would scarce do her bidding, she asked—'How much?'

He named a sum which went beyond even her dreads; she said piteously, 'I haven't nearly so much!' and in spite of herself there was a sob like that of a helpless child in her voice. It reached the impressionable part of Francie, and he sat down beside her and sobbed too.

'Cynthy, Cynthy,' he said, putting his throbbing forehead down upon her shoulder, 'I never meant to end like this. I meant to keep straight and be a credit to father, but somehow the luck's been against me all along. The other chaps are all rich, and I don't see how I could be expected to make my allowance do in such an expensive regiment; you've no idea of the awful drains there are on a fellow's pocket, and all compulsory. And when Colquhoun went away'—

'He has left you?' Her voice was full of cold surprise.

'He was called North a week ago to his guardian's death-bed. Besides, he can't touch a penny of his money till he comes of age, next August.'

She listened mechanically, her hand softly smoothing his, while he poured out a hundred excuses and palliations; but her mind was feverishly working all the time. Suddenly she saw the way clear, and, freeing herself, got up.

'I know how to manage it,' she said, trying to speak cheerfully. 'If you stay here till grand-mamma goes to bed, Francie, I'll let you in by the library window, and get you some supper, and you must sleep here, and then in the morning, early, you can go back to town with the money.'

He shook his head.

'I can't come to the house, but you might bring me a mouthful to eat, if you can, and then I'll tramp back over the moor to Oakchester, and catch the midnight express.'

She did not seek to dissuade him, guessing that this, too, was part of the mystery that must surround his visit, but putting the thought from her while she had to act. He had time for many emotions—contrition, and shame, and vain repentance among them—before he heard her light foot again, and stole out to meet her. She brought some food upon a plate, and a little flask of wine, and, trusting to the darkness of the harbour, lit a candle that he might see to eat, standing over him and encouraging him. Then, when he had finished, she tied a silk muffler round his neck, and put

the flask, with what was left of the claret, in his coat pocket. It was only then that she thrust her little purse into his hand, and with it a small morocco case.

'There is nearly a hundred pounds left,' she whispered, 'and mamma's pearls will make up the rest.' Then, seeing the working of his face, and his shamed endeavour to refuse the gift, she put her arms round his neck and said—

'Hush, dear! I know what you would say, but they are yours as much as mine, since they were hers. And—and I could never wear them if— Oh, Francie, what does anything else matter, if you can do what is honest and right!'

He went out from the shadows that sheltered him, stealing like a guilty thing, and her heart went with him in unutterable pain and pity. She did not ask what he had done to bring that look of hunted fear upon his face, and she never knew; but she took a dim comfort in thinking that she shielded him from bitter reproaches and the sharp censure of lips that would not spare him.

But the shattering of a sublime belief is hard, and to Cynthia, with her lost ideal, the future looked more grey than the spectral garden about her. And granny's door was shut, and though she beat upon it with her hands, in wild longing for the love that would have led her in and mourned with her

and comforted her, there was no answer but the silence.

Then physical exhaustion brought the tears that would relieve, and crouching there upon the threshold, she sobbed her bruised heart out.

CHAPTER XII



CYNTHIA strove to hide her unhappiness, but her father's eyes read her face too well not to see some change in it.

'What's the matter?' he asked lightly, when she met him at the station. 'Your grandmother, I know, is quite well, for I had the last of her commissions only yesterday. I left Kitty blooming and beaming, and the rector waved his oldest wide-awake to me across the Oakchester platform. So I can only conclude that some beloved beast must be ailing. Don't tell me Grover has let Barnaby Rudge down and broken his knees, for I've spent all my spare cash on books, Cynthy.'

'Barnaby is all right, and so are all the dear things. And what should make you imagine I'm ill, father? Did you ever know me to have anything the matter with me since I was in the nursery?'

'Too pale a face! You might have been dwelling in soot and dust, instead of me. Well, I've a bit of news for you that should act like a tonic. Frank

hopes to get leave next month, and to bring Colquhoun with him.'

'When did you see him?' she asked, bending down to arrange the rug about his knees. She had driven alone in her little pony-cart to the station.

'Only yesterday—I was sorry to delay, but your brother is a young man of many engagements apparently, and the interview took as much arranging as if he were a crowned head.'

'I hope he'll come,' she said, with such serious earnestness that Sir James laughed.

'So that's it, is it? The rascal doesn't deserve that you should pine for him, Cynthia. He looks very well, and makes a brave show in his uniform; he was obliging enough to let me have a glimpse of it before he changed, when I went to his quarters. He was in capital spirits.'

Cynthia breathed a sigh of relief, and yet her own burden was scarcely lightened. Herself absolutely true by nature, pure-hearted and straight-minded, it was no small part of her pain to deceive the trusting father from whom she had never before concealed her smallest thought or plan. When she remembered that only his scrupulous delicacy had made it possible for her to help Francie without question, she wept in her bed, to think how sadly his trust had been betrayed. And yet she would willingly have endured her own sufferings ten times over, to save him from what might be a yet heavier

cross. If only Francie would 'keep good!' Then she might forget everything, and blot the memory of that sad night out of her life.

But Francie did not come home when he got his leave, and though he had the perfectly reasonable excuse of an invitation he was anxious to accept, Cynthia, who had been laboriously building many homes for hope, found them all crumbling again in ruins at her feet. If she could see him—one glimpse of his face would tell her much—one whispered word—ah, surely he would not deny her that!—would set her heart singing. And there was none to whom she—so open and frank by nature—could tell out its heaviness. Honour and pride alike forbade an appeal to Archie, who was, besides, much absorbed for the moment with an old and greatly exacting guardian, and she could only remind him, in the notes they still exchanged, by some special message to her brother, of his promised guardianship. But the struggle between love and duty must needs tell upon such a temperament as hers, and when Cynthia grew no rosier, and let her step flag when she deemed herself unseen, Sir James took matters into his own hands and sent for the Torbridge doctor.

'Your fears carry you away, James,' said Lady Considine, with her chin in the air. 'You were just the same with poor Margaret. If her finger ached, you were in a worry. Young people ought

to be taught to bear their little complaints with fortitude.'

'Cynthia has made no complaint. It is I who grumble at her pale cheeks.'

'What else can you expect when you encourage her to run out at all hours with nothing on her head, and not even a pair of goloshes on her feet? The wonder to me is that she has not developed consumption.'

'I am thankful,' murmured the poor father, 'it is not so bad as that! But last week you attributed her want of colour to sitting indoors over her books. As both indulgences can't be to blame, we may as well give Dr. Smith his choice!'

But Cynthia protested so stoutly, and with such a fine flush on her cheeks, and the brightness of anger in her eyes, that there was nothing the matter with her, that the doctor was fain to agree.

'A little run down,' he said, being compelled to say something; 'our Devon climate is relaxing in the early summer. A week or two at the seaside—perhaps. Some nice lively place. You would enjoy Ilfracombe, now, wouldn't you, Miss Considine?'

'Indeed I shouldn't!' said Cynthia, laughing. 'I hate a dressed-up place! I would far rather go to Lundy Island, if you could promise bad weather all the time, to keep off the trippers.'

'I hope the poor man hasn't many such ferocious patients,' said Sir James, when the doctor, mollified

with cake and wine, had gone upon his way. 'You nearly snapped his nose off, Cynthia.'

'It could stand shortening,' she said, with a laugh of recovered good-humour, 'but you were a very bad daddy to spring him on me unawares. How could I go through the humbug of having my pulse felt and my tongue examined, when there's nothing in the world the matter with me! I think it must be you who are yearning after Ilfracombe gaities, and are making me the excuse!'

But, like all unobservant people, Sir James, when he had once allowed his fears to be aroused, could not easily lull them to sleep again. It came upon him with the sudden force of a conviction that Cynthia must find it but dull travelling on the road of life with two pilgrims so much older than she; and when the rector—taken into his confidence—suggested that she should accompany Kitty to Germany, he eagerly caught at the proposal. It was purposed that Kitty should repair the omissions in her education with some knowledge of foreign tongues, and the sanguine Terrys had visions of France and Italy as a continuation of the German pilgrimage. In the meantime, some study of advertisements, and a lengthened correspondence, induced them to fix on the establishment of a certain Frau Rothmann at Cannstadt, who offered unheard-of advantages at an astoundingly low rate.

'It sounds very cheap,' said Sir James distrustfully, examining the Frau's last letter through his gold-rimmed *pince-nez*, as he sat in the rector's little study. 'Don't you think, Terry, it's perhaps *too* cheap—food and lodging and tuition for a sum that would scarcely secure one the services of a good housemaid?'

'All Germany is cheap,' said the rector with decision, 'and Stuttgart is one of the most moderate of German towns. Wait till I show you the other offers we had—several of them for half these terms! We haven't been rash, I assure you, Sir James; we've slept on the matter, and I may say we've dined and supped and breakfasted off it for the last three weeks!' He laughed his hearty laugh. 'Dear me—where do things disappear to?' He tossed over the massed papers on his table. 'Those letters have vanished!'

'Never mind,' said Sir James; 'half this sum would certainly mean starvation, and we can't allow our girls to face that. You won't think I'm throwing any doubt on your choice, Terry, but may I suggest that we let the girls give Frau Rothmann's establishment a month's trial before making a definite arrangement? We can trust to their good sense not to make imaginary complaints, but as Cynthia isn't very well'—

'Certainly, my dear sir!' the rector agreed, with heartiness; 'a very sensible idea. We've got a

capital account of it from the German pastor—lost, like the others, of course; why will women persist in tidying?—but a man's point of view is apt to be superficial; at least, so my wife says—and I wouldn't have the poor children unhappy for the world.'

'A little roughing it won't hurt them,' said Sir James, thinking with an inward smile that to Kitty, at least, this would be no novelty. 'But even if they don't assimilate any mental food, they must have enough to sustain bodily health.'

When Cynthia heard of her father's decision, she at first rebelled, but he only laughed at her, and when she saw that he really adhered to it, she yielded, and even began to take a very natural and wholesome interest in the prospect of such entire change.

'You're a terribly untravelled young woman,' her father said, 'and we can't have little Kitty crowing over you! If you can pick up a little German, so much to the good, but enjoy yourself, my dear, and come back feeling glad you were born an Englishwoman. Then you won't have gone for nothing.'

Cynthia laughed.

'I can promise you that before I set out!' she said. 'And I'll try to acquire a German accent, and not a German waist.'

'Ah, yes; by the bye, how much do you want for clothes?'

'Not much, dear daddy. I don't want to be a ruinous expense to you, and Kitty says our oldest things will seem very fine over there, where there's a kind of halo round everything English!'

'You have never cost me anything,' said Sir James very kindly, 'and you shall have all you want; I suspect you will find yourself obliged to supplement a good many things over yonder, little comforts and refinements you would otherwise miss; and you may draw on me as your banker to any reasonable amount. You will know how to let Kitty share without wounding her susceptibilities.'

Kitty was in the wildest state of delight when she heard that Cynthia was to be her companion, and danced her round the room till Cynthia had to cry halt for breath.

'It's too lovely!' cried Kitty. 'It felt like going into the land of bondage, to set off alone; for, you see, I'll have to grind awfully.' Her charming face took on a rare melancholy. 'I've got to learn, so that I may be able to teach, if I don't marry and am left a parentless orphan! Can you imagine what it would feel like to be what old Peter used to call "an *indignant* gentlewoman," Cynthia?'

'Easily enough, if you don't get off that pile of stockings, Kitty,' said Cynthia, going soberly on with her packing. 'And you'll be an indigent one if you don't mend yours!'

'Oh, bother!' cried Kitty, pelting Cynthia with

them. 'I'm meditating on my future; what's darning as an elevating occupation compared to that! Cynthia, I wish you wouldn't pack up your conscience in your box!'

'Shall I leave it behind, to keep yours company?'

'I know what it'll be!' groaned Kitty; 'I'll never be able to be comfortably idle for half a minute, with you goading me on and poking and prodding at me! And you'll pretend you've forgotten your English, when my tongue's just aching for a chatter!'

'Perhaps I'll be an orphan old maid in want of an occupation some day, too.'

'Perhaps!' echoed Kitty with light derision.

Sir James accompanied the girls to town, and would have gone all the way with them had not Cynthia, knowing his dislike of trains and hurry, succeeded in persuading him to let them go alone. At the station a surprise met them, for shortly before the train started a hansom dashed up to the entrance, and out of it sprang Archie Colquhoun. He had rushed off after morning parade, without time to change, and, though rather dusty and heated, looked a well-grown and manly young fellow in his uniform.

'It was a near shave!' he laughed, as he shook hands. 'But I bribed cabby to fly, and he did it to such purpose that I'm ten minutes to the good!'

'It was awfully nice of you!' said Kitty; but Cynthia only looked her thanks.

He managed to have a word apart with her as they paced the platform, and he placed a little parcel in her hand hastily wrapped in paper.

'From Frank, with his love,' he said.

She recognised through the torn wrapping the morocco case which held her mother's pearls, and the blood mounted in a great wave to her forehead.

'But'—she stammered.

'It's all right,' he answered with easy cheerfulness. 'You don't mind my knowing? You see, Frank tells me everything, and I was to say how awfully sorry he was that he had bothered you. You know what a muddled chap he is about business, and he had a resource that had never occurred to him. He made me promise to meet you and tell you.'

She did not guess at the time what the 'resource' was, and he never meant her to know. He had succeeded in sending her away with a lightened heart, and that was all he cared about.

CHAPTER XIII



CYNTHIA tugged at the window casement, and gave a great gasp of relief as it suddenly flew open, and a rush of sweet summer air met her hot face. The shutters of the opposite house were still fast closed, so she pushed her curly head out and surveyed the silent street up and down. White houses stretched in a long row as far as she could see, with little dusty gardens in front of them, and at the end of the vista there were wooded slopes making a background for the Kursaal, where one or two early pilgrims were already going to drink the waters. The fresh air woke Kitty, who, after some yawning and stretching, flung off the *plumeau* and joined Cynthia at the window.

‘Kitty, I thought you were never going to wake!’ she cried. ‘I looked for my sponge, and then remembered we were too sleepy and tired to unpack last night.’

‘I thought I never was going to wake, myself,’ said Kitty. ‘I dreamt I was one of the princes

in the Tower. That thing'—she gave a withering glance at the bag of feathers humped upon the floor—'gives you as realistic an idea of suffocation as you need ever wish to have.'

'Oh, it's German!' said Cynthia indulgently. 'Kitty, I wish you'd pinch me! Can you take in that this is Wurtemberg, and that the sun is beginning to sparkle on the Neckar just down there, and that there are real live grapes growing on all the hills?'

'I wish they'd grow round the window,' said Kitty; 'a supper of sausage and raspberry vinegar—especially if you can't eat it—makes you awfully hungry next morning.'

'I smell coffee!' said Cynthia, with a relishing sniff. 'The Germans have one excellent virtue—they're not what nursie calls "slug-a-beds."'

'No, they're feather-beds tied round the middle with a string. There isn't such a thing as a waist "made in Germany." Look at Frau Rothmann! Observe that old woman down there leading that fragment of a dog by a string! Poor little bow-wow; it's hopeless to tug against that mountain.'

'That's only two (I wish she'd let the poor doggums loose!), and the population of Wurtemberg alone is'—

But Kitty had seized the *plumeau* threateningly.

'Statistics before breakfast!' she cried. 'What next?'

'Let's unpack, then,' said Cynthia good-temperedly. 'It's horrid living in your box.'

'You'll have to, I'm afraid. A drawer and a half each! And we can't divide the pegs, because there's only one! I'll make it over to you, Cynthy, as your wardrobe is so much more extensive than mine. Did you ever hear of a Christian country where they don't offer you soap to wash with?' She continued her investigations.

'Perhaps it's an "extra."'

'Water must be a double extra, then, if that milk-jug full is going to wash both our faces! If this is to be a "parlour" boarder, I'd just like to know what a common or garden one has to put up with.'

'If it's a conundrum, I give it up,' Cynthia laughed. 'Kitty, you've got up on your wrong side.'

'Why do they make you lie under the bed instead of on the top of it, then?' demanded Kitty, beginning to dimple. 'Eureka! here comes breakfast at last!'

The girls found the fresh crisp rolls delicious, and even the weak coffee tasted good. It was apparently a privilege—which they did not greatly appreciate—to have it served in their bedroom. The rough-handed and rough-mannered maid-servant brought it on a black tray, and thumped it down with a hearty 'Good morning.' She stood surveying

the strangers—her arms akimbo—with the liveliest curiosity, shouting remarks to them in a voice pitched purposely high, to reach their understanding.

‘It’s no use,’ said Kitty, with a sorrowfully shaken head; ‘you’ll only make yourself hoarse, my friend; we’re not deaf, we’re “hignerant,” as Joel says of Mrs. Joel, when she pretends not to hear. Let’s try her with some Devon, Cynthy.’

‘Oh, that’s no good! Scotch would be more to the purpose, if we had Archie here; he rolls his r’s just as she does. Do think of the German for “bread,” Kitty. I want another of those twists.’

‘Oh, there’s an easier way than that! Primitive man didn’t bother with words when he was hungry. He just opened his mouth and pointed. See, I told you she’d understand!’ as the grinning *Mädchen*, nodding like a Chinese mandarin, went out of the room.

‘There’s nothing like using your faculties; I wish you’d exercise your pantomime on Frau Rothmann, and persuade her to give us a cupboard. The room is like a rag-shop. We’ll have to draw a chalk line across the floor, Kitty, and keep each to her own side, or we’ll get into a fine muddle.’

‘Then one of us’ll have to get out by the window!’

‘No, we’ll draw it the other way, and we’ll each have half the toilet-table, and half the fresh air.’

They busied themselves for some time in unpacking such of their clothes as they could find room for, but Kitty soon wearied, and sat cross-legged upon the floor, with the photographs of Harum and Scarum and the boys in her lap, and her blue eyes rather shadowed.

'Don't they look reproachful?' she said, addressing the pictures indiscriminately. 'Archie is so glum, I'm sure he must have been thinking of us when it was taken.'

Cynthia stopped with a brush in each hand to look over Kitty's shoulder.

'Why, that one was done ages ago, when the boys were "snookers" at the R.M.C., before anybody dreamed of our coming! Francie doesn't look glum,' she ended, a little wistfully.

'Francie's a Spartan; he's got a fine command of his feelings,' Kitty smiled, 'but I know he'll miss us just horribly, when he has time to remember. As for you, my beloved Harum and Scarum Terry, I know you're just slobbering for grief, when you're not consoling yourselves with forbidden bunnies; but you wouldn't have liked the doggie society here—nasty little bandy-legged Dachshunds!'

The girls found their position in a German household rather anomalous. Frau Rothmann had a large day-school, with a staff of non-resident teachers. She occasionally took as boarders German pupils coming from a distance, but for the time she had

none. Her household consisted of a niece, who went about all the morning in yellow curl-papers and practised music when she was not cooking, and a young, shy, and spectacled Divinity student, who only appeared at meal-times, and then gave his whole attention to the satisfaction of his appetite. Fräulein Lina's large mouth was very ready to curve into amiable smiles, but her acquaintance with the English tongue was extremely limited; Frau Rothmann neither understood nor spoke it. But her school had some reputation, since she was careful to select good teachers, and the system of Government inspection under which all schools are held in Germany ensured thoroughness. With some difficulty on both sides, since Kitty's pantomime—which secured a wardrobe and a second washhand-stand—availed nothing in this case, it was explained to the English Fräulein that they must choose between learning the rudiments with the younger children on the class benches and arranging for private instruction. Kitty professed indignation and dismay, but Cynthia took the sensible view.

‘What does it matter?’ she said. ‘Those mites won't hurt us, and we're just on their level of knowledge here. Besides, I believe we'll get on faster. Miss Armitage used to tell me how much easier it was to teach several than one.’

‘And how nice you will look in a red pinafore and a pig-tail,’ mocked Kitty, ‘sitting on a bench with

your little strapped shoes dangling; and how lovely to see you put in the corner!’

Of the two, Kitty was much the more likely to meet with that fate, for she persisted in viewing the situation with levity, and so distracted the solemn, shy young teacher with her dimples, her sudden pouts, that never before had discipline been so hardly maintained.

Cynthia bore with philosophical calm the stares of the little *externes* and the audible titters of the big ones, and won their regard by gifts of sweets and help with English exercises during the odd minutes of recreation between each class, when scholars of every grade were turned into the grassless patch of garden for exercise. It soon became a matter of daily occurrence for the tall and sympathetic Cynthia to be seen with a plump maiden hanging on either arm, while sentimental confidences in fluent German and broken English were poured into her ear.

‘It’s very good practice, of course,’ she said to Kitty, in the seclusion of their room, ‘but I do wish they’d talk of *things* sometimes, instead of people.’

‘What things?’

‘Oh, the sea-serpent—anything! Half of them imagine themselves in love with the singing-master, and the other half with that theatrical-looking Herr Bracke, who teaches the first class. Perhaps he might be nicer-looking if he wore a clean collar and cut his hair short; but, Kitty, I do feel so thankful

we've always had the boys to keep us from getting any nonsense of that kind into our heads! Of course, most of those girls have brothers, but perhaps German brothers are different.'

'Ready to be fallen down before and worshipped, to a man!' cried Kitty, 'so how can they snub and sit upon the girls? I daresay even our charming and fascinating Herr Richter is quite prepared to be adored!'

But she ceased to torment that miserable young man from the day she inadvertently addressed him as *Du*, instead of the formal *Sie*. It would be difficult to say whether she or the teacher were the more embarrassed by the giggle that ran round the class, but, in spite of her hot blush, Kitty maintained her dignity and held her little head aloft. Alone with Cynthia, her annoyance burst forth.

'It was so horribly vulgar,' she cried, 'to laugh at a foreigner's mistake! I believe they think I'm like themselves, and that I did it on purpose!' Then she laughed in spite of her vexation. 'Why can't they be content with one word, as we are,' she said, 'instead of making those ridiculous distinctions? If one's enough for us, it might do for them! It's such silly waste. I hate their old tongue! I shall be saying next, like the idiot of a girl Amy Lethbridge told us of, that I'm *verlobt*, when a man asks if I'll dance with him!'

Kitty sobered down, and, with her natural quick-

ness, soon caught up the slower Cynthia; but she was listless, and took far less interest in her studies. Cynthia found a grand and sonorous music in the language, as it gradually unfolded itself to her ear, and took especial delight in the mighty march of Luther's hymns, one of which each girl was expected to commit to memory every week and repeat at the Saturday theology class. Kitty, for some unexplained reason, lost her brightness and vivacity, and even the sweetness of her temper seemed in danger of turning acid. She, used to a far less luxurious mode of life than her companion, yet shrank with infinitely greater distaste from the privations and discomforts of Frau Rothmann's house. She turned with dislike from the strange food, and lived chiefly on coffee and rolls and the fruit and cakes which Cynthia bought to tempt her. Fortunately for the health of both, they were allowed entire freedom during the afternoons and long summer evenings, and Sir James's liberality permitted them to make many little excursions, which remained in the memory of each as a lasting delight.

Frau Rothmann, who spent her own afternoons in a social round of coffee-drinkings, would nod her head until the bugles on her best bonnet jingled, when she met the girls dressed to go out, and would make some complimentary remark about the trustworthiness of the English 'miss,' on whose behalf no chaperon was required.

‘We ought to invite her to go with us, after that pretty speech,’ said Cynthia.

‘Let’s take Fräulein Lina instead. Let’s give her fringe a chance, for once, to escape from those yellow papers, and show itself off! Let’s go to the Schillerhöhe. Oh, Cynthy dear, don’t you long for a real fresh-air blow upon the moor?’

CHAPTER XIV



UNFORTUNATELY for Cynthia and Kitty, their stay at Cannstadt began at a season when the larger part of the English community at Stuttgart had gone in search of summer change. Even the chaplain, to whom Kitty had a letter of introduction, had left with wife and family, and the *locum tenens* who took duty was a young unmarried man. The girls were thus thrown a good deal upon their own resources for counsel and amusement, and made few acquaintances. To Cynthia, absorbed in examination of the life about her, this mattered little, but it gravely concerned her that Kitty should so often look unhappy. She would brighten indeed when they sat in the Schloss-Platz and listened to the military band, or saw the women duck and the men flourish off their hats as the King, a kindly-looking country gentleman, walked about on the skirts of the crowd. Kitty would jump up and make her curtsy then, too, her pale cheeks flushing; she liked the shops in the bright

and handsome Königstrasse, and the café under the colonnade where they so often went for tea, and was Cynthia's willing companion in exploring churches and palaces and museums; but when they got back to quiet little Cannstadt, with its white houses all asleep in the sun, she immediately began to droop. Cynthia was infinitely distressed and perplexed, though she strove to hide it. This was a side of sunny little Kitty's character for which she was quite unprepared, not understanding that some natures sicken and wither under transplantation like a hedge flower immured in a garden border. Her own more vigorous fibre helped her to rise above small discomforts, and make light of ways that were only the more amusing because they were new and strange. She did not profess to enjoy German cookery, but she could always eat enough to maintain her abounding vitality, while her mind was eagerly set on drawing deep of the new wells of knowledge. She had worked her way up, by force of sheer diligence and perseverance, to profit by the tuition of girls more nearly on a level with herself in point of age, and had dragged Kitty with her from that bench of small, pig-tailed maidens still at the A B C of life. Sometimes she doubted the wisdom of this step, for, though Kitty worked doggedly, especially after the weekly letter from home, the blue circles darkened under her eyes, and Cynthia suspected many head-

aches to which she would not confess. Kitty, however, was perfectly frank in her pronounced detestation of her tasks. 'I learn because I must,' she said, 'and because—because I'm not quite such a wretch as to vex the dad and the mother, when they've pinched and scraped to send me here; but I hate it, I hate it, I hate it!' And Cynthia, who learned because she loved to see new doors of knowledge opening on every side and offering far vistas of unconquered wisdom, could only look at her with troubled wonder.

'What am I to do with you, you "wisht" little thing?' she asked; 'you've eaten nothing all day, and you can't live on air. Shall I make you a cup of tea?'

'Ess, fay!' cried Kitty in broadest Devon. 'That's plum!' she said, as she thirstily drank the cup Cynthia brought her. 'There's a language for you, now, with some meaning in it. "Plum!"' she tasted the word on her pretty lips, 'and you would prefer "*sehr nett*," I suppose.'

'I would if I could get the "r" to come out of the middle of my throat. Kitty, I believe you're home-sick.'

'Ban't no good: us can't run home-along. Theer, set in thicky cheer, an' us 'll talk.'

'Us won't unless you eat. Tell me, Kitty, tell me true—you didn't hate being at school in London, did you?'

'Didn't I just! I used to strike off each day on the calendar till the holidays came. But auntie was nice, and I saw the boys sometimes; and Cannstadt—isn't London.'

'I remember the day we first met. You told me you were sorry to leave school.'

'I was a dinky maid then, and I knew no better. I never dreamt that fathers and mothers were half so jolly. Besides, though I was born in India, I've got Devon blood in me, and I suppose it's got to come out.'

'I'm Devon, too, but I'm very happy here; I shouldn't like it for always, of course, but for a little while'— Cynthia paused to muse upon her advantages. All was going well at home; her father's letters were studiously cheerful, they had even a strain of light gaiety; he assured her she was not missed. It was true Francie wrote but seldom, and then mere unsatisfactory scraps that told one nothing; but Archie's weekly letter came regularly. More and more she was learning to lean on this friend, to take comfort in his trustworthiness, sure that it would never fail her. The horizon thus clear, she could have warmed herself very happily in the sun over her head, if only it might shine for Kitty too.

Her first step was to consult Frau Rothmann, taking Lina as interpreter to help out her own halting German with English scarce more nimble.

The two women expressed themselves kindly, with many an 'ach!' of sympathy; both rashly committed themselves to experiments in English cookery, and Fräulein Lina generously offered private lessons. Cynthia, sure that she could make good the sacrifice to music, eagerly caught at the suggestion. To get Kitty away from the strain and unrest of the schoolroom would be an immeasurable boon. She mentally saw Kitty lying on the red velvet sofa, which was the finest ornament of their room, listening to the purr and prattle of Lina's innocent conversation, and imbibing German without knowing it. She wouldn't hate it after that! Lina must be privately instructed to ask curious questions about Devonshire: that would interest Kitty. She would talk out her heartache, and forget it.

Cheered with her innocent wile, Cynthia secured the address of a doctor, whom Frau Rothmann volubly recommended, and promised, with some hesitation, to urge upon the patient a certain herb tea, which had the enviable reputation of curing everything. The doctor's address she instantly set out to verify, in case of sudden need, regardless of the heat that made a blaze of the pavement and was reflected, like a scorching breath, from the white houses. After a pilgrimage made longer, by one or two wrong turns, than needful, she at last found the house, inspected it furtively from the opposite side, decided that it inspired a certain

amount of confidence in the owner, since all the windows were open, and fervently hoped she might never have to climb those spotless steps or make appeal on Kitty's behalf at that shining knocker. Then, having bought the most tempting grapes she could find in the market, she went home.

'What a salamander you are !' said Kitty fretfully. 'I believe you like this tropical heat. I've been lying watching that candle trying to take off its grease and sit in its wick, and I'm sure I sympathise with it.'

'It is hot !' said Cynthia, struggling with her gloves. 'I wish we could knock a hole in that wall and make a through draught, but I'm afraid it would blow you away, kitten ! You mustn't take off any more flesh, dear, for your little bones are too visible already. See, here's something to make 'you feel' cool.' She put down the little basket, the purple bunches peeping out of it between the vine leaves, at Kitty's side.

'Did you go out to buy those for me ?' asked Kitty, quickly penitent ; and in this softer mood she listened to Cynthia's plans, and, after some half-hearted remonstrance, yielded to them. She owned that the chattering of the girls, even the scraping of pens and the scratch of pencil on slate during school hours, grated upon nerves that had got a little beyond control. *Fräulein Lina*, with her inborn love of

music, had a voice that had no wearisome note in it.

So for a little while all went well, and Cynthia hoped that with the waning heat of summer Kitty would revive like a drooping flower. But nostalgia has a way of defying all one's preconceptions, and Kitty's home-sickness began to affect her physically. Though she tried to make light of increasing aches, Cynthia's anxious eyes could not but note many disquieting symptoms, and it became now the one trouble of her mind to know what she ought to do. Kitty not only fiercely refused to see a doctor, but defied Cynthia to write and awaken alarm at the rectory. She threw herself into such a feverish condition by the strength of her opposition to this suggestion, that there was nothing for it but to yield to her, and promise silence.

Light came to Cynthia as she sat alone in the little Lutheran Church on a Sunday morning. She could follow in some degree the *Prediger's* weighty arguments, or at least pick out enough to make listening worth while, and she enjoyed the slow full flow of the German hymns, tune and words now alike familiar. Suddenly, while she sat, the solution flashed upon her.

'I must write to father and tell him all, and he will come and take us home.' But clear as this reasoning seemed, her first impulse was to resist it. She did not want to go home yet. She wanted to

be a great deal wiser, learn much more, so that she might be a better comrade to that good father. And this was her one chance.

‘He will never spare me again,’ said selfishness; ‘he will be glad of an excuse to fetch me back now! Much of Kitty’s uneasiness is fancy,’ the inward voice went on. ‘She might think of you. And consider the disappointment it will be to the rector and Mrs. Terrý if she fails, after all the sacrifices they have made to send her!’

But happily those early lessons she had learned at granny’s knee were not without their fruit in her riper years. Just as there are things that it is wrong to conquer, so there are others where the very health of our soul depends on the securing of an early victory. It was no easy conquest—it never is—this recognised supremacy of little things over the larger purposes of life, this lording of the trivial over the nobler planning; but Cynthia made a brave push to bring her artillery up in time, and before the preacher had come to ‘lastly,’ the day was won.

And there came to her the reward that comes to everyone who in any measure tries to follow in His steps who taught that a man should give all—even to his life itself—for the sake of another; for the sacrifice that had loomed so large dwindled to its real proportions as she walked home with a sober happiness on lip and brow. To see Kitty’s face

brighten and beam again, and her father's lighten with the old kindness—who would balance love so true as theirs against all the lore of all the ages?

‘Father will manage it beautifully,’ she said to herself, already anticipating that meeting. ‘He will find a way, so as not to hurt Mr. Terry’s feelings, of getting Kitty taught without sending the little woman into exile. He is such a dear, clever father!’

She wrote that same evening, a letter which she endeavoured to make plain, sensible, and clear, neither exaggerating nor withholding anything, and did her best to curb her impatience for the answer, and her disappointment when it did not come.

The date she had fixed in her own mind for its arrival was already over-passed by a week, and a misgiving was establishing itself that her own message had gone astray, when Kitty, seated at the open window which commanded a length of street, said languidly one morning, as she lay back on her pillow—

‘There’s such a nice-looking man coming from the station, Cynthy. I haven’t seen anybody so trim and clean-looking since we left home—I think he must be an Englishman, from his clothes: he’s got on a light overcoat and a tall hat—it is nice to see a chimney-pot again!—and grey gloves and a buttonhole. Come and look; he’s crossing the street.’

Cynthia, moved inwardly by the description, took a peep behind Kitty's chair, gave a little gasp which was half a laugh and half a sob, and without a word flew downstairs, where, to the astonishment of Marie, at work upon the steps, and to the ruination of its dainty buttonhole, she flung herself upon that light-grey overcoat.

CHAPTER XV.



CERTAINLY Sir James was a magician, since he so managed matters that Frau Rothmann was not only not offended, but expedited the little party with smiles and nods, and a hundred good wishes, when they left her house for the Hotel Marquardt, where the English gentleman had taken up his quarters.

Various circumstances helped him to a prompt decision, chief of them, perhaps, the sight of Kitty's quenched beauty. Cynthia had ten precious minutes alone with her father in Frau Rothmann's little salon, and then, blaming herself for selfishness, she flew to share the great news with her friend.

'Run down, Kittums: never mind your frock—your hair is all right! I'm going to hunt up Fräulein Lina, and get her to make some coffee. Father has been asking what's become of you!'

But it was not the old impetuous Kitty, skipping three steps at a time, who went downstairs, but a sober maiden with faltering, lagging foot, and a head

that drooped like a tired flower. Sir James tried to hide his concern under a lively greeting.

'Why, Kitty,' he said, 'you don't look as if you and the Fatherland got on very well together. What is the matter, my child?'

At this kind tone, Kitty's blue eyes filled till they looked like drowned forget-me-nots.

'Oh, if you've come to take Cynthy away,' she said, vainly trying to restrain her sobs, 'I can't bear it! I can't be left alone here!'

'I have come to take you both away,' he said cheerfully. 'I suppose we get to like our plagues, but somehow we old folks came to miss you young ones, so your father and I put our heads together, and I was despatched as an embassy to make terms! If you feel in my overcoat pocket, Kitty, you'll find my credentials. Your father has written, and your mother has sent you a box of cakes (but they are at the hotel), as a foretaste of the feast of welcome you may expect.'

'Have you really and truly come to take us home?' said Kitty, reviving like a thirsty plant under a refreshing shower.

'Really and truly,' he responded, 'and I'm glad to find two such amenable young women. I was afraid, from the enthusiastic tone of Cynthy's letters, that I should have to deal with rank rebellion.'

Then Kitty's face clouded again.

'Cynthy does like it,' she said, 'the lessons and

the masters and the girls—she doesn't even mind the horrid things they give us to eat. She says it's well worth swallowing any kind of messes, to have the chance of studying Schiller on the spot where he lived.'

'Dear me, I should have credited her with better sense!' said Sir James, looking round the crude little salon with a smile: 'I should have imagined, apart from the food, those bead mats and Berlin wool cats and dogs would have spoilt even Schiller's charm.'

'We don't study here. The schoolroom is quite bare, and Cynthia says it lets you concentrate your thoughts better to have only blank, whitey-grey walls to look at. Sir James,' she lowered her voice and spoke miserably—'if Cynthia says she wants to go home, it's all because of *me*, and because she knows I hate this place, and I'll feel a horrid, mean, selfish thing all my life after!'

'So bad as that?' he said, with a laugh. 'So I'm to run off with you, and leave Cynthia behind? Suppose we bribe her to come with us? Do you think a month or so of foreign travel—a glimpse of other German cities, or a corner of Switzerland, perhaps, would make up for the study of Schiller on his native heath? (He did little here, if I remember, but mistake his true vocation.) Could you endure to put off the home-going so long as that, Kitty?'

'I could bear anything—anything!' she cried

servently, 'so long as I was with you and Cynthy, and had home to go back to, and'—she ended, blushing with a sudden realisation of her own ungraciousness—'I should love it too. It was the thought of being left here alone, so far away, so far from everybody I care for, that was with me night and day.'

Sir James could not find it in his heart to blame her for the tender folly. In a generation thirsty for change, ready to fly at a moment's notice over half the world for a new sensation, impatient of natural ties, rebellious against parental restrictions, it pleased his old-fashioned notions to find one young thing who considered her own quiet corner of England the best the world had to offer. If there were another reason for Kitty's eagerness to take flight, his courteous delicacy left it unguessed. Sometimes, indeed, he seemed to be almost in touch with the secret which Kitty's brimming heart appeared unable to conceal, but if that were so, he was scrupulous in avoiding any advantage the circumstance might give him, and only the more gravely, kindly thoughtful for her comfort. 'A high-minded, clean-souled, honourable English gentleman,' her father had called him once, and with every fibre in her Kitty endorsed the description.

As for Cynthia, when she returned with the coffee, her father's eyes scanned her face in vain for signals of discontent. Renunciation, if it is to be

worth anything, must be a whole-hearted affair, without backward looks or martyr sighs; and if Cynthia had had her struggle, it was over, and her battle-field green again. Indeed, as he looked, his pride in her could not but grow. The simple life had suited her, as it suits most healthy English girls; her figure had taken more gracious curves; she even seemed—though she laughed the idea away—to be a little taller. Into her eyes, born of her study and of new scenes, there had come a measure of reflection, the woman looking out of them, though still with the fearless frankness of a child. He found her—and told himself it was not all a father's fondness—entering upon some small inheritance of her mother's beauty. Margaret's rare charm, Margaret's dear remembered graces, would never be hers, but the turn of her head upon her neck, the curve of her lips as she smiled, the truth that spoke equally from the daughter's grey eyes as from the mother's blue, all reminded him with mixed pain and pleasure of the dead.

She fell with cordial relish into his designs, when they were propounded over Frau Rothmann's coffee-pot and *Kuchen*.

'A whole month with you, dear daddy? How splendid! But what will grandmamma do without us?'

'She will do very well. She is inviting an old acquaintance to visit her. By the way, Cynthy,

this lady—Mrs. Winstone—it is, under whose guidance you are to make your curtsy to the world in spring, and she will be glad to see what manner of young person you are before she undertakes the responsibility of launching you.'

'She'll be afraid of Cynthia,' said Kitty, beginning to smile again. 'Cynthia's acquiring a mind above frocks and frivolities; if you hadn't come, Sir James, I think she would very soon have abandoned a waist, and taken to plaiting her hair round two wooden balls, and wearing spectacles.'

'If that is the logical sequence of a study of Schiller, I think my arrival was well timed.'

'Oh, you may tease, both of you,' she said, too happy to do anything but laugh. 'Kitty can't forget that I said I shouldn't mind being bulgy about the middle and bare about the temples, if I knew as much as Frau Stocker, who teaches the first class science.'

'I think I'd rather you stopped short of such profundity, my dear.'

'So I will, a long way short! I'll never be clever enough to justify me for going about a fright. As for this vain little thing,' she said, a hand on Kitty's shoulder—'she can't get a pair of shoes in this vast Fatherland to fit her small feet, and is not a little proud of the fact!'

'Oh no, Cynthia; but I never pretended to stand on such a solid foundation as the Germans!'

'What do you think of her, father?' Cynthia asked, as she was walking back with Sir James to the station. 'She is brighter since you came.'

'I think, if her waist was in no danger, her brain ran some risk,' he said, with a smile that belied the gravity of the words. 'You did right to send for me, Cynthia. There is no harm done that a little care and kindness won't easily mend, but a highly-strung temperament, such as hers, requires more study than her father and mother seem to have thought necessary. I am sure, however, that neither Mrs. nor Mr. Terry had any real idea of the place to which they were sending you—a mixture of an elementary school and a boarding-house, with the advantages and comforts of neither.'

'It isn't what you think, father!' She defended the position eagerly. 'The teaching is most thorough; the masters, though they are only students themselves, have a real grasp of their subjects, and I suppose because they think clearly, they are able to make them clear to the pupil. And learning with others is a great stimulus, especially to a slow-coach like me. I never could understand how it only worried Kitty. But then, she wouldn't eat.'

'You did?' He looked at her with quick affection. 'I can't honestly say you look starving, Cynthia!'

'Oh, I've got a most vulgar appetite! I can always eat—even apples and potatoes mixed up

together, and barley-broth with raisins in it, though I can't say I'll be sorry to say "good-bye" to German cookery.' She walked on a moment silently, a tall maiden, keeping free step with him. Then she put her arm through his and squeezed it. 'It is so good to have you, daddy! This was the only bit of my life we haven't shared since I was little, and I used to wonder how I'd explain about everything, so as to make you understand. And I'm glad you thought I was right about Kitty. It was so difficult to know what to do for the best, for she wouldn't hear of my writing to the rectory, and sometimes I got frightened, and sometimes I was afraid I might be making a fuss.'

'You acted like my wise, sensible Cynthia; and in any case, did you not suppose your old father would be glad of an excuse to go to you? Put worry out of your head now. Try, if you can, as you go through life—I don't say it's easy—to see the end of your trouble when it's at hand. We mostly make the dark road a great deal longer than it need be, by expecting it to go on for miles, when perhaps the very first turning to right or left would bring us to the light.'

'You are my light! Look, do you see that tall, narrow house over there, with the green shutters? It belongs to Herr Doctor Paul Koenig, who is said to be the best medicine man in Cannstadt. He wears a muff in winter, to keep his hands warm,

and, as you notice, he opens his windows in summer to keep them cool.'

'Commend me to that considerate pulse-feeler!'

'Yes, I used to say to myself he must be common-sensible and considerate; but somehow I never could screw up my courage to go up his steps and ask him to prescribe for Kitty. It was the thought of describing her symptoms that frightened me. For how could I say to him, "There's nothing the matter with her, except that she doesn't like your country"?''

'If he were a wise man, he'd have retorted, "Then let her return to her own." We'll take her there by a roundabout route, and show her some pretty things by the way. Dr. Diet and Dr. Quiet may be trusted to do the rest. Find out from her where she'd care to go: it's all one to you and me, isn't it, so long as we see the world together?'

'All one, father!'

'Well, I'm going to send you home now, and I suppose I must let you go alone, though I don't half like it. After to-morrow, your liberty will be curtailed.'

'Oh no,' she said gaily, 'it will only be doubled, for in this unenlightened country you can scarcely do anything or go anywhere unless you belong to a man!'

CHAPTER XVI



MAITERS did not fall out quite as Cynthia had predicted, for when the travellers got back to Fordedge they found grand-mamma firmly set against any further attempts at self-instruction.

‘You have had your way long enough, James ; it is quite time you handed Cynthia over to me, if she isn’t to develop into a wild woman.’

‘Or to me,’ said Mrs. Winstone, who had sacrificed a country visit in order to have a glimpse of her future charge. She went off next day with her maid and a large array of boxes, and Cynthia was rather sorry, for her middle-aged countenance was bright and cheerful, and her easy flow of talk made the first evening at home pass off pleasantly.

‘I hope you will like coming to stay with me, Cynthia,’ she said at the last, as she stood buttoning her gloves and looking with amusement in her brown eyes at the rather serious countenance which the hall fire portrayed. ‘I have launched a good many girls in my time, and I’ve never known one

whose dread of a London season survived the first week.'

'I don't think I'm afraid—exactly.'

'No; but you think it rather a waste of time, perhaps? I am not quite sure of that. I am not quite sure that we haven't some obligations to balance against inclinations. We can't live in a solitary world, Cynthia, and society does one thing for us, if it does nothing else—it rubs off our little prejudices and angles, and helps us to see that other people's ways may not be wholly bad, though they are not our ways. Your mother and I were young together, dear—we came out the same year—and I have never seen any girl enjoy herself so wholeheartedly as she. I am sure her bright face helped others to be happier too, and her perfect belief in and simple assurance of the goodness and kindness of the world perhaps did something to lift it to her ideal.'

'Granny was like that,' said Cynthia, rather moved. 'I don't mind coming, Mrs. Winstone, and I will enjoy myself.'

'But I hope you won't make such a very serious business of it!' Mrs. Winstone laughed. 'I think we shall get on, Cynthia, and I predict that we shall agree on more points than you imagine possible at present.'

Cynthia sank down on the bearskin rug when the carriage had gone, and drew the Persian cat towards

her with one arm and the blue Skye, Mac, with the other.

'I suppose she's right,' she pondered. 'And I do like new dresses and fun and excitement as well as anybody. It's the having to think about it all so long beforehand that's such a bore. Grandmamma might just as well have let me use the next few months to get a little more into my head, instead of doing bazaar work and making calls and frittering away time on nothing.' Then she thought of Kitty's relief at the reprieve from the German tutor for whom she herself had hoped, and smiled. 'Poor Kitty! it does seem a shame we can't change lots; it would suit us both ever so much better.'

Then her mind left the unwelcome future and came back to the present, and she wondered if her father would call at the rectory on his return from the station and bring Kitty with him. Even in her least cheerful moods, Sir James, with his kindly, quiet ways, had a soothing influence on Cynthia's friend. If there had been any shadow of mistrust in her mind, any spectre of permitted jealousy, she might have speculated with uneasy misgivings upon the open interest her father seemed of late to take in Kitty.

It had begun—for she could date it precisely—during that delightful month of summer wanderings, and the very hour when she seemed to have surprised a confidence between them was vivid in her

recollection. It was while they were at Lucerne, and Cynthia, detained indoors by the dutiful task of a letter to grandmamma, was only able to join her father and Kitty just before lunch. Out in the open she forgot everything, as was her way, save the enchanted world about her, and, pausing by a hedge of late roses in the hotel garden, she drew deep inspirations of delight as she looked down upon the translucent green face of the lake and up to the everlasting snows. Then the lunch gong, with its prosaic summons, scattered her raptures, and she went briskly over the sun-steeped slope to her father's favourite seat, a shaded bench with a glimpse of rare fairness seen between over-arching trees.

He was there, a finger between the pages of the book he had ceased to read, his face turned towards Kitty, who sat drooping beside him. Surely she was crying, and that hand he placed upon her cotton-clad shoulder was meant for comfort.

Cynthia turned her back unscen of either, but her astonishment soon merged into a complete understanding with herself that this was none of her business. If Kitty were burdened with any hidden trouble, she had an inalienable right to seek counsel with whom she would. Where, indeed, could she find a better adviser than the wise and kindly father to whom she herself had gone with all her own little woes? Cynthia, brought up on odd lines,

and Lady Considine never failed to remark, had been taught to take the broader view—which men generally hold—of friendship. She did not exact from it the last tithe of mint and cummin, or twist its privileges into instruments of torture. Because she was Kitty's friend, she did not demand to hunt the quivering recesses of Kitty's heart and track its last reservation home.

She was fair-minded enough to realise that the little sum of our sensations—growing from atom to atom, from cell to cell, to form the reef of experience—is solely and wholly our own, differing from that of our neighbour-builders in life's sea as one atoll in the Pacific blue differs from another. If anyone could help the structure, surely it was not she, still fashioning her own fabric beneath the ocean, but he who had risen above the waves into the serene quietude of the upper world.

Such similes, perhaps, did not occur to her, but she was loyal to her friend in refraining from word or look of curiosity. It was clear that Kitty had not brought an entirely contented heart back with her to Devon; she was less feverishly restless and irritable than when in Germany; but trouble still had its home in her eyes, and her smiles were fewer than of old. Her father and mother looked at each other in some anxiety.

'I'll never forgive myself for sending her away,' said the impetuous rector. 'She has come back

quite different, Mary. Can't you find out what is troubling the bairn ?'

Mrs. Terry shook her head thoughtfully.

'She is growing up,' she said, 'she is leaving her childhood behind her.'

'Ah, but I can't have my little Kitty growing into a grave old woman before her time. If she's ill, my dear, she shall have the best advice in London, if I have to throw over the Rural Dean to take her there myself.'

'She isn't ill, Hanbury.' His wife looked at him wistfully. 'Girls take strange fancies sometimes.' She remembered, being a woman of much sympathy, the unrest of her own youth; the disquiet of reflections and ideas and speculations that loom so large upon the horizon of a girl's growing mind, altering the serene scenery of her life, and bringing vague whispers of coming change; but the rector, who flew to quick conclusions, turned upon her with wrath, thereby breaking the mainspring of his watch, which he happened to be winding.

'I hope you don't mean to tell me,' the words rushed out, 'that she's lost her heart to one of those beggarly German chaps!'

'Dear me, no!' Mrs. Terry laughed. 'You needn't prepare to annihilate anybody, Hanbury, and it's a pity you sacrificed your watch to your alarms, for the hall clock has stopped, and how are we to know when to get up?'

'Tut! Nature will waken us. The birds have no clocks. But the child is always at Fordedge, Mary.'

'Why not? She has Cynthia there, and next to Cynthia Kitty adores Sir James.'

'Well, I don't grudge her that admiration,' said the easy rector heartily; 'but, with no wish to be uncharitable, I hope when her day comes my little girl will marry an honest Englishman, and a Devon man for preference, rather than a foreigner.'

A few days later Kitty surprised both her parents by asking leave to go on a visit to her aunt in London. The rector's face fell at first, but instantly a hundred excellent reasons occurred to him for consenting. The glory of the splendid summer hours had passed, and late autumn, with its heavy dews, its richness of fallen red and gold, its rains, with the sodden, steamy, sunless days that follow in their train, is the doctor's opportunity. With a contraction of the heart the rector remembered a chance encounter with Joel Burge the day before, and how, after a long recapitulation of his own woes, the old man had said—

'Pears to me lil missy ban't no better mor'n auld Joel. She'm wisht an' drawed thin 'bout the faace, an' grawed to be a shadder, an' not herself nohow. I says it respectful and in sorrer. 'Tis bad fashion weather for she, but us'll hope her ban't gwaine to's

graave, though the young do be snatched sudden, times, an' the auld left awver.'

He had laughed at the moment at 'Dismal Joey's' words of woe, but they had a sting for him to-day, and without another hesitation he made up his mind to write secretly to Sister Annie, and conjure her to get the best possible medical advice for the little maid. By the same post went a note countermanding the order for an *Encyclopædia* on which he had long set his desires; the money would be wanted now for travelling expenses and doctor's fees, but he made the sacrifice without a thought. Mrs. Terry was not quite so easily won over. She followed Kitty into her little bedroom at night, and sat awhile, watching her let down the ripples of her sunny hair. Kitty took a great deal of gold out of her mother's life when she left that mother's side.

'Are you quite sure you want to go, dearie?' she asked presently. 'You used to be such a little country bird, and London is a gloomy place in autumn.'

Kitty struggled a minute for words; the veil of her hair hid her face.

'It isn't that I want to leave you, mother'—her attempt to speak with cheerfulness was not very successful—'and I hate London, but I've been thinking I ought to be doing something—learning something—I don't know enough to teach, and'—

‘We don’t want you to work, childie, not while father and I are here to care for you. By and by—Well, the future is in good keeping; but you will never be quite without friends, my Kitty.’

‘Don’t, mother!’ Then, with a little strained laugh, ‘Let’s be “common-sensible,” as Cynthia calls it. I’m not thinking of anything wild, nothing to frighten your dear old-fashioned notions. Only to go and stay with Aunt Annie, and get some dress-making lessons. It’s the one thing I’ve any kind of turn for, and it would save something if I made my own clothes—and yours.’ By this time she was able to turn and peep behind her locks with a flickering smile. ‘I’ll bring back the very last styles, and turn you out like a fashion plate in the *Queen*, motherie.’

Mrs. Terry brushed aside the curls, and took the dear little face between her hands. It quivered, flushed and paled, but the limpid eyes into which she gazed met hers without shame, if not without some shadow of sorrow. The mother’s love read it there, and her heart filled and ached a little, as a mother’s heart will when first she realises the unbridged gulf between her child’s nature and her own.

‘Would this make you happy and content, dear?’ she asked.

‘Yes, mother,’ said Kitty eagerly.

‘Then you shall go.’ She stooped and kissed the

ripe red lips, and smothered a sigh which rose at the picture of her own loneliness. The loneliness, indeed, had begun already, for Kitty had stepped beyond the borderland of childhood, where a thought is no thought at all unless it can be shared.

So Kitty went; and not until her little box was packed and already mounted on Joel Burge's barrow to be taken to the station was Cynthia made aware of the sudden decision. She could not help showing some indignation at Kitty's want of confidence, and expressed it rather vigorously, but Kitty was making strenuous endeavours to draw together the waist of a hold-all bulging with last thoughts in the way of travelling necessities, and pretended absorption.

'Come and stand on it, Cynthy darling, and don't be cross. I'd have told you, but it was only settled yesterday, and what with the telegram to Aunt Annie, and mending my things—and half of them at the wash, and the other half lost, stolen, or strayed—I've had a terrible old time of it. She'm fair drove off her blessed legs, this Kitty is. Give Sir James my love, Cynthy, and say "good-bye" for me.'

'But, Kitty,' cried her friend, still aggrieved, 'it's madness flying off like this and leaving me—and Francie coming next week, too.'

'You'll have him all to yourself,' Kitty tugged at a strap with a flushed face.



'You'll have him all to yourself.'



· 'And do you suppose he'll like that?'

Cynthia said the words carelessly enough, but they came back to her later with a dull echo of pain. Frank did not indeed like it when he found Kitty had fled.

CHAPTER XVII



HAVE put you at the front of the house, that you may have something green to look out upon, and not feel so lonely,' said Mrs. Winstone to her young visitor; 'it isn't so bad an imitation of the country after all, is it? If you shut your eyes to the surrounding houses, you can imagine you see your Devon woods before you, and though I can't promise you larks or thrushes, you will be wakened in the morning—very unseasonably—by a chorus of sparrows!'

'It is very nice indeed,' said Cynthia, with smiling assent. 'I have only once been in London before, and then I remember nothing but grey houses climbing up on every side and trying to shut out the sky.'

'Ah, but I am going to correct all those false impressions, you know! Now, you would like to unpack and feel settled, and then rest till dinner, wouldn't you? But you must have some help with your boxes.'

'Oh, I can manage nicely alone. Nursie takes

me in charge at home, but I learned to do everything for 'myself in Germany.'

'I am going to lend you half of Mitchell while you are here. You will find her invaluable, though, like all domestic treasures, she requires a little humouring. But I should advise you to be guided by her in matters of the toilet, Cynthia, for she was so fortunate as to have her training under a French marquise, who was gifted with an intense sense of colour and the most perfect taste I have ever met with. I always submit meekly to Mitchell myself, for though I sometimes rebel secretly, I am bound to own that I invariably come round to her view of what is fitting in the end.'

'It will be very kind if she will help me,' said Cynthia cheerfully. 'Grandmamma's Anne makes my best things, with the help of Miss Fisher from the village, and I daresay they are all wrong.'

'We shall go shopping to-morrow, if you are not too tired. To-night I have no engagement, so we shall have a cosy evening alone together, and get to know a little about each other.'

Cynthia, grateful for an arrangement so thoughtfully made for her comfort, felt her spirits rise, and the stock of good resolutions with which she had set out from home seemed a lighter burden. There was nothing in her reception to dismay. Mrs. Winstone sent the carriage with the ever-useful Mitchell to the station to meet her, and herself

awaited her guest in the spacious and comfortable house in Belgrave Square which she had occupied for a few married and many widowed years. Her welcome was cordial and sincere, and Cynthia found her few remaining prejudices melting rapidly under the solvent of smiles and chat and fragrant tea.

The house gave one an impression of absolutely perfect control over details, only to be achieved by the possession of very ample means. It echoed no latest fashions in its furnishings, but if its luxury was half a century old, it none the less adapted itself to every imaginable need. Cynthia, thinking of poor Mrs. Terry's troubles with the two maids who came and went with such startling frequency, of grandmamma's diatribes against the modern developments of service, felt that here, at least, there would be no talk of delinquent cooks and conscienceless housemaids! Mrs. Winstone's staff, from the dignified butler to the humblest scullion, might have been automatons worked by well-oiled machinery, so silently did they perform their work of ministration. The absence, indeed, of all internal or invading noise was the first thing that struck her with a surprised sense of relief. You could not hear your own footfall on the thick carpets: even the passing traffic of wheels struck upon the ear with a merely soothing rumble. Her own room, facing the enclosed garden space, gave, as Mrs. Winstone had pointed out, a refreshing glimpse of green, seen at

the one time of the year when, for a brief week or two, it keeps its freshness undefiled. With a bit of spring caught and imprisoned between those railings to keep alive her memory of home, with all manner of curious comforts and prettinesses to study within the four walls of her own domain, Cynthia would have been more of a misanthrope than Nature designed, had she not been very well content.

A young pleasant-faced girl came to unpack, and, with the help of a button boy, afterwards removed Cynthia's trunks and straps. She returned with a brass can of hot water, cunningly kept warm by a pretty cosy which matched the ware of the wash-stand. ('A hint for Kitty,' thought Cynthia.) Later, Mitchell introduced herself—an elderly woman with a tragically plain face; but, in spite of a grumbling voice and a determined habit of seeing the black side of everything before the white, Cynthia soon discovered her to be the possessor of a very good heart, and won her way without difficulty to its regard. Indeed, she owed many more substantial services than early cups of tea, cosily-warmed slippers, and a lavender-scented wardrobe to Mitchell, for she not only had, as Mrs. Winstone claimed for her, an unerring taste in dress, but was able to give Miss Considine many little hints that helped to make a not over lavish allowance go a good deal further. Lady Considine had hitherto fixed the amount of Cynthia's quarterly expenditure,

reckoning it on the comfortable basis that economy may be safely practised at home, where everybody knows you, and may be risked in quarters where you are unknown. But that line of argument did not apply to Cynthia's present circumstances, and grandmamma had herself written out a cheque for a substantial sum as a gift to the *débutante*.

'Spend it wisely,' she said, with the worldly wisdom she sometimes produced for her granddaughter. 'Think twice, for you can only buy once—and you can't afford to make mistakes. I have always told you, my dear, that you may easily be too clever, but in London you can never be too well dressed.'

So Cynthia determined to buy her wisdom from Mitchell, and certainly reaped her reward. Meantime, Mitchell found a word of praise for the silky fineness of the young lady's hair, but declared it was a sin to see it so badly dressed. With deft fingers she twisted the coils in a fashion that displayed the pretty shape of Cynthia's head and round white throat. She rejected with a sniff the white dress Cynthia had proposed to wear, and after a critical examination, shook out an old black gauze, and declared that, with a touch of orange, which she proceeded to supply, it was just the very thing.

Her skilful fingers had surely a kind of magic, for as she surveyed her transformed self in the long

Then, Cynthia blushed with pleased surprise at the image it reflected.

'I do think I look rather nice,' she said to herself, and the conviction gave her a comfortable sense of not requiring to be shy, as she ran downstairs.

There was someone else that evening who entirely agreed with that verdict, and expressed himself heartily to the effect that she looked 'stunning'; but that remains to be told. The ladies dined alone, and afterwards spent half an hour in the small conservatory built out at the back of an inner drawing-room with a second door opening to the corridor.

'This is my hobby,' Mrs. Winstone said, 'and it is rather a heart-breaking one, for pot-flowers have such a short life in London, my poor favourites never live to grow old. Perhaps it's because I insist on taking care of them myself, and don't do it properly, or, as I sometimes suspect, they are forced into a growth that is not meant to last more than its day. That's the evil of the contract system, Cynthia; one's flowers pass in and out of one's life like one's acquaintances—they never come to take root.'

'Then that is one thing in which the country can score over town; our flowers have a leasehold of the soil. I wish you would allow me to help you here a little in the mornings, Mrs. Winstone. I

haven't granny's lucky fingers, but she taught me to love plants.'

'So you shall, if you will wear gloves, and pick up all your dead leaves. But I warn you, you will have neither time nor inclination for morning occupations presently. I have been accepting invitations for you, and you will have to make up for early hours at night by late ones in the morning.'

A little later, while they sat in the lamp-shaded drawing-room, Cynthia with a bit of needlework, over which she was stooping, Mrs. Winstone said with a smile—

'I think we are going to have a visitor after all, Cynthia. A friend of yours, perhaps.'

'Oh no!' Cynthia, who had heard no sound, was beginning, when, to her astonishment, as she looked up, she saw the door thrown open and heard 'Mr. Colquhoun' announced.

'Archie!' she exclaimed, but her surprise increased when she saw him shake Mrs. Winstone's cordially extended hand before he touched her own. They both laughed at her bewilderment.

'He is an old friend of yours, Cynthia,' Mrs. Winstone said, 'but I think I can claim a still larger share in his recollections, though I have only lately succeeded in recovering the boy friend I knew when he was in kilts. We kept it as our secret, a little surprise for you, since, as Archie modestly said, you would find London less of a waste howling

wilderness, and my house less of a prison, I suppose, if you felt that he might share your captivity.'

'Yes,' said Archie, finding it difficult to take his eyes from her, 'that's just how I put it, Cynthia.'

'I find the speech quite characteristic,' she laughed. Her eyes were bright with the pleasure of seeing him again, but presently they grew a little wistfully eager, and asked a question he could very well read.

'Frank's all right,' he said. 'He couldn't come with me to-night, but he sent you a lot of messages, and if Mrs. Winstone will let him, he will look in one day at lunch-time.'

'My dear Jonathan,' said Mrs. Winstone a little drily, 'your David does exactly as he likes, and that is perhaps why I see him so seldom; but tell him I expect him to be on his good behaviour while his sister is here. You may both consider yourselves invited to lunch whenever you please to honour us; but I can't promise anything more, for Cynthia and I are going to be two very popular and important people. But if you ask us civilly, we might consider whether we could spare an afternoon for Aldershot by and by.'

'Oh, do!' said Cynthia, turning to her hostess with all her heart in her expressive face. 'Couldn't you ask her prettily, Archie?'—she turned to him. 'She knew you when you were in kilts'—

'My dear, he never did anything prettily when he was in kilts. He was a terrible little bear, and

his manners were a heart-break to all right-thinking parents and guardians.'

'I've mended them now, and I can promise for Frank that we'll both do our best to make things go off.'

'But tell Frank to come before that,' interrupted Cynthia, with a shade of anxiety neither of them missed, and both, perhaps, understood better than she guessed. 'His visit was so short in the autumn, and he found it dull with grandmamma ailing and Kitty away.'

'Kitty's home again, isn't she?' asked Colquhoun.

'Yes, just before I left. Things have somehow mismanaged themselves lately, or we might just as well have left home together.'

'Frank and I called once or twice at her aunt's, but she was always out. She seemed awfully busy.'

'Oh, she took to dressmaking with the true Terry fever. I'll never make up to her now. But it has done her good; she is ever so much better—almost her old self, and I think even prettier.'

'Is that your little friend,' asked Mrs. Winstone, 'who looked like a wild rose caught in the rain?'

'I thought Kitty never did anything but laugh,' said Archie, looking puzzled.

'She's a rosebud in the sun now, anyway; the rector looks ten years younger since she came back.'

Cynthia went to bed with her heart dancing to

the tune of Francie and Aldershot. But when she fell asleep it was to dream that she met Archie in some vast and untracked wild as a small, sturdy, sandy, 'kilty' boy, and knew him for the tall and straight young soldier of real life by the steady, friendly blue eyes that met hers in the Land of Visions.

CHAPTER XVIII



BUSY time followed for Cynthia in the week or two that yet remained before the first of the May drawing-rooms.

The all-engrossing business of shopping took up the mornings, and became quite a pleasure, as Mrs. Winstone conducted it with a deliberate dignity that left one plenty of time for the enjoyment of choice. Cynthia, with her quick eye for colour, delighted in the lustrous hues and rich tones spread before the matron, though Mrs. Winstone would generally say, with a smile—

‘I wonder what is the use of our looking at those silks and satins, Cynthia, without Mitchell’s permission?’

‘Oh, but they’re lovely in themselves,’ Cynthia would reply, ‘even if we have to see them on other people’s backs!’

‘Well, we have got your presentation frock fixed,’ said the chaperon, with a sigh of satisfaction, ‘and nobody can say it isn’t absolutely simple. I think, with a couple of evening frocks and some

nice fresh morning ones, you should do. We shall go on to Madame Blanc's now, and see about your hats. And, by the way, you must have a new habit, dear. The cut of yours is quite out of date, and nothing marks a girl more than that. It must be ordered at once, for Henry Montgomery has promised to call and take you to the Row with Janie.'

Cynthia made the surprising discovery that simplicity in dress is rather costly; but she took a great deal of pleasure in her new clothes, and a most innocent satisfaction in perceiving how well they became her. It is a pity, indeed, when girlhood thinks it a mark of superiority to despise the fit adornment of her person! Mrs. Winstone had a wise word to say on this question—

'I have never thought time spent before the looking-glass wasted, as some people do, Cynthia—the people who in some mysterious way associate dowdiness with godliness, and who plume themselves upon being virtuous because they do their hair badly! Think a good deal about your clothes while you are putting them on, and you will be able to forget them comfortably afterwards, to the great benefit of your manners.'

Mrs. Winstone was, indeed, very companionable through the liveliness of her mind, and Cynthia enjoyed their drives in the Park, the little lunches and quiet dinners to which they went together, and the concerts and receptions which filled up

the evenings. It was all a new world, and she found herself expanding in it and learning the best of all lessons—to take an interest in other people's interests. She made friends readily, and several people, with an indulgent appreciation of her youth and brightness and quick, magnetic charm, prophesied quite a little success for her when she made her real entrance into society. Cynthia's grey eyes, lit for the most part with expectation, were only shadowed from time to time when they reflected her disappointment about Francie. He promised so often to come, and he came so seldom. There was always, indeed, some reason for his absence which answered very well in the daytime, but seemed to hold less well together in the night season, when it was brought out for examination.

'You can come!' she said once, rather cruelly, to Archie, who, indeed, found time to run up pretty often for lunch. 'Why can't he?'

'Because I haven't half his popularity, Cynthy. I never knew such a chap as he is for filling up his time. I scarcely see any more of him than you do. Besides, he did run up the other day, and you were out.'

'Yes, I know. I could have cried, I was so vexed. And the time before he wouldn't stay, and some people were here, and it was altogether horrid! I scarcely had a word with him. But I don't think him looking well.'

'He's all right.'

'You'll—you'll be sure to tell me if he isn't, Archie—if—if anything should happen to him? One can never tell, and—he does look ill!'

'You have my word for it, Cynthy.'

'Yes. And I do trust you. I don't know what I'd do without you, Archie! You are coming to the Verieres' little dance, aren't you? Mrs. Winstone says I may go, because their rooms are all art muslin and Japanese things and palms; but I'm not to go to the Courtenays', because all their pictures and silver and diamonds are heirlooms! Can you read me the riddle?'

They both laughed.

'I don't know the Courtenays, so I don't care,' he said; 'but I called on Mrs. Veriere on purpose to get an invitation.'

'What a shameless confession, Archie!'

'I heard you were going, you see. How many dances will you give me, Cynthy?'

'As many as you like,' she said frankly. 'I don't mind dancing with you, Archie. Do you remember that Christmas-time we practised in the schoolroom to Mrs. Terry's music on the squeaking old piano? But, generally speaking, I like old men best, or boys. Life before you begin it, or life after you have lived it, makes people most interesting, I think.'

'Because both the future and the past are dreams,

Cynthy. I suppose I am a prosaic chap, but I like to be in the thick of it myself.'

'Oh, you are going away presently to fight,' she said, with mournful cadence. 'That is living!'

'We're not likely to get our marching orders for another six months at soonest, worse luck!'

'Worse luck, bad boy, when you know how we'll miss you!'

'I hope you will,' he said, looking at her earnestly. 'It would be hard lines if there weren't somebody at home to care what became of a fellow; but you wouldn't think much of us if we didn't put our work before everything, even—even friendship.'

'Oh, we needn't rehearse the parting just yet,' she said lightly. 'Mind, we're coming to the Camp on Monday, and, if you've to put Francie in irons, see that he's there to do the honours!'

But the visit to Aldershot was perhaps the deepest disappointment of all. Mrs. Winstone had arranged the expedition with some little difficulty, setting aside one or two engagements for it. The morning was dull, with threatening clouds, and but for the pain to Cynthia she would have studied her rheumatism, telegraphed to young Colquhoun, and stayed comfortably at home. But Cynthia's pleading face conquered her.

'We'll go, my dear,' she said kindly. 'The rain may hold off, and I haven't the heart to think of all those cakes and flowers bought for us being

wasted! But I'm afraid you'll see an ugly place at its ugliest, and be rudely disillusioned.'

Her prophecy was only too sadly fulfilled. The rain did not hold off, but, instead, descended in torrents, blurring the landscape, wrapping the moorland in mists, out of which the network of ragged pines loomed ghostlike. Archie met them at the station, his face almost as gloomy as the day, to report that Frank was taking musketry practice under canvas, and couldn't possibly be with them till later.

'Take us to the hotel then, my dear,' said Mrs. Winstone in a resigned tone; 'everything is bound to go wrong on a day like this. Put me in front of a blazing fire, to get the rheumatism out of my bones, and see if you can't manage to cheer up my poor companion!'

Though sadly dispirited, Cynthia elected to go out, and had her first view of Aldershot picking her way through a muddy, brown river with upheld skirts, and trying to avoid the drops from Archie's umbrella.

'It might have been worse,' he said, by way of being consoling; 'it's a sickening place for dust in summer.'

She had to laugh at that, and she plucked up some spirit as he showed her the barracks, and the huts within the lines, and took her the round of the stables; but she carried away a general impression

of back views and sodden coal-dust and struggling vegetation and general unloveliness, that made a mockery of the fancy picture her brain had conjured up.

Tea was over, and Mrs. Winstone had taken more than one unseen peep at her watch when Francie at last came in, up to the eyes in mud, and tired out with a long tramp. A fresh brew was made, and he brightened up as he ate and drank, and something of the old charm came back to his manner as he chatted to Mrs. Winstone; but Cynthia, devouring him with hungry eyes, read under his fitful gaiety lines of worry and care. He was handsomer than ever, but his expression had hardened.

She slipped her arm within his, as they went down to the carriage. 'When are you coming to see me, Francie?'

'Oh, soon; but Burton's away on leave.'

'I know. He might have chosen some other time for his holiday!'

'It's been a wretched day. And you've spoilt your frock, Cynthy.'

'Oh, that's nothing!' she said eagerly. 'You'll come next week, won't you, Francie, to the drawing-room tea Mrs. Winstone insists on having? You'll come to support me and see my "braws"?'

'If I can I will.' He kissed her gently as the train was starting, but his face had fallen again into lines of gloom.

'Did you hear the mess bugles tootling?' Mrs. Winstone asked, as she drew up the window. 'I'm sure that poor boy wants his dinner badly, and we shall be shockingly late for ours. This is one of our unlucky days, dear.'

'But we saw Francie,' she answered, as if that made up for everything.

The long-anticipated day upon which she was to make her reverence to the Queen dawned fair and serene, a day of smiling beauty, as if Nature—so old a mother herself—were in sympathy with the fluttering fears and hopes of many young hearts. Cynthia found the ordeal of presentation much less formidable than her anticipations of it, and passed through it with a charming grace and modesty. 'I am so glad it was the Queen herself,' she said, 'the royallest of royal ladies! They wouldn't have been content with anything less in our village!'

'You are a reigning sovereign there yourself, no doubt, Miss Considine,' said one of Cynthia's old-new friends.

'No, only a ruling one,' she laughed, 'and my powers are very limited.'

Mrs. Winstone's drawing-room teas were always popular, and her spacious rooms were well filled, many ladies driving straight from the palace to see and be seen. Among the younger of those who had that day kissed the Queen's hand, Cynthia took a very good place. Her dress was pronounced a

miracle of art, her bouquet a miracle of nature, and Mrs. Winstone's eyes rested on her with satisfied pride. Stately and tall she looked, with something of her mother's grace, and a dignity of bearing, inherited too. Her complexion, of a healthy, creamy white, the tint of a new-blown camellia, set off the dark silkiness of her hair and the lustre of her deep grey eyes. Inspired with loyalty and love for her sovereign, full of a happy excitement, forgetting all her troubled thoughts about Francie in the certainty that he would come to see her on this, her little hour of triumph, Cynthia had never looked so nearly beautiful before.

To one who saw her, himself unseen, she had ever been fairest among women, and the cup of pain he carried seemed full to the brimming, as he saw the laughter that, like sunshine, lit her face.

She had withdrawn for a moment from the crowded rooms, and was standing, her train caught over her arm, at the outer entrance to the conservatory, reading a letter she had found awaiting her on the return from the palace. It was from Kitty, and as her eager glance scanned it, her smiles came and went. 'Now don't you be letting them put you into any of the fashion papers,' Kitty admonished; 'it's vulgar, and they'll give you a waist no bigger than your wrist, and eyes the size of your mouth (and it's a good size, you

know, darling!), and the folks here will be more convinced than ever that you've been "pixey-led," and will come home a changeling!

Oh, light words that hit so near the truth! for it was indeed a changed Cynthia, at the end of all her light and laughing mirthfulness, who went home to Devonshire.

'She looks so happy!' Archie Colquhoun groaned, his own face grey and drawn with pain. And then, with that bitterness even the least selfish must sometimes feel, he added fiercely, 'And she will hate me; she'll never think of me except as the bringer of bad news.'

A moment more he stood at the end of the corridor, looking at her, so fair a vision of triumphant youth, with the plumes upon her head and the gay flowers crowding round her; then, with that magnetism there is in the human gaze, she felt his eyes upon her and lifted her own.

CHAPTER XIX



HE smiled upon him radiantly, her looks going eagerly beyond him, and, finding nothing there to arrest them, coming back to his face with a shadow upon her own.

‘Frank?’ she asked, and, with the pronouncement of the name, a sudden, deadly realisation of calamity reached her brain. Somewhere within its recesses there beat a thought that she had known this moment would come, and that she had always prepared to meet it. After a silence that seemed to both illimitable, though it was only a moment of time, she went forward to meet him.

‘Tell me,’ she said.

He forced his dry lips to utterance.

‘He wants you,’ he said. ‘That’s why I’m here to-day—of all days.’

‘He is ill?’ she questioned, and across the dreariness of her young face he read a gleam of relief. It cut him to the heart to quench it.

‘In trouble,’ he said heavily. ‘He’s well enough

in health. I promised I would tell you. So I had to come. How soon can you be ready, Cynthia?’

‘In five minutes,’ she said, stemming the barriers of emotion. ‘Not now, not now, not now!’ was her inward cry, ‘not while he wants me,’ as she flew upstairs and flung off her finery. There was no one in the upper part of the house, the servants being engaged below. The dress she had worn at breakfast lay upon the bed; the sheet spread for the protection of her satin train had not been removed; hairpins, ribbons, discarded gloves, scattered upon the toilet table, spoke as if across a century of pain, so remote, already, looked this morning’s careless joys. Forcing her fingers to obey her, Cynthia changed her dress for a walking one, her white slippers for buttoned boots; and selecting such things as she might need, packed them in her travelling-bag. She did it all within the space she had allotted, and wondered to find herself so calm. So far, all her thought had been to reach Francie without a moment’s loss; but when she had rejoined Colquhoun, and he had taken her bag, she remembered the explanation due to Mrs. Winstone.

‘Go to her and tell her,’ she besought him. ‘No, wait! I will tell Marston to ask her to speak to you in the library—I’ll wait for you in the cab.’

Archie was detained longer than he expected. Though he said as little as he could, Mrs. Winstone

was deeply shocked. 'Is there no way of tiding over the disgrace?' she asked. 'If money'—

He stopped her with a lifted hand.

'He has been advised to send in his resignation,' he said; 'that will spare them at home; I pray God it may spare Cynthia too! She shall never know, if I can help it. I have telegraphed for Sir James, and expect him to-night. Colonel Bullock is an old acquaintance of his. But for that'—

But Mrs. Winstone would not let him go till he had promised that Cynthia should return to Belgrave Square that evening.

'I insist upon it,' she said. 'Her brother's—illness—will explain her running off like this, but she *must* return to my care. If I hadn't this ridiculous erection on my head, I would go out and tell her so myself. Her brother's disgrace can be kept quiet; it must not touch her. Remember, I know best, Archie, and I expect you to obey me.'

'Do you think,' he said, 'if I could have kept her away from him I'd have let her go?'

'Now!' said Cynthia, turning to him as the cab rattled off.

Her grey eyes were full of sorrow's self, but they commanded him.

'Cynthy dear'—he laid his hand firmly upon hers—'I want you to listen, and to ask to know no more than what I am going to tell you. You trust me, don't you?'

'Yes,' she said faintly.

'If I can't explain everything,' he said rather huskily, 'it is because—you wouldn't understand, and because there are some things best left untold if—if a fellow is to have another chance, as I pray God our Francie will. He has got into difficulties (if only men would not play cards for money!), and his colonel—who has been awfully kind—has advised him to leave the army. It is the right thing for him to do, Cynthy; bear that in mind, dear; but Frank loves his profession, and he's awfully cut up about it. He's here, in rooms, close by, so that you can see him every day, and I want you to cheer him up, and encourage him to think there's a long future before him in which to make good the past. God knows,' he said simply, 'there's many as fine a battle fought outside the army as in it!'

When they reached the door of the lodgings Colquhoun had taken, Cynthia turned upon him a face that had recovered its courage, though it was deadly pale.

'Let me go to him alone,' she pleaded.

He opened the door of the sitting-room silently, and as softly closed it behind her. Frank sat at a table, despair in every line of his listless body, his head bent upon his folded hands. He lifted it on her entrance; the beauty of that magical face was marred; to one indifferent, unsuspected secrets of

disposition must have stood plainly revealed, but the sister saw nothing, save a misery dwelling there profounder than her own—remembered nothing but her great love.

‘Francie!’ she said, with infinite tenderness, and was kneeling by him.

‘Cynthy!’ he cried, with a man’s deep, heart-breaking sob.

‘Dear, I am here; I am come to stay with you,’ she whispered. She drew his head down upon her shoulder, resting her cheek against his, and so, once again, as in the old long-gone days of childhood, her tears flowed with his, while her hands were groping to lift and bear his burden for him.

But what struck her own sorrow deeper was to see her father’s silent suffering. Here was another stricken down upon a battlefield ‘strewn with the sorrowful carnage’ of perished hopes, lost ideals, betrayed trust; and for such wounds as his she had no healing. Once when, with arms about his neck, she would have said some word, he put her from him very gently. ‘Not now, my dear,’ he said; and she, who knew him so well, felt that even for her there was no passing that barrier of loneliness behind which pain dwelt.

There were other things in this time of black remembrance that hurt the surface of Cynthia’s mind as a scratch may be felt even by a cripple who has

suffered amputation. No attempt has been made here to paint her perfect, and perhaps it belonged to the very real unselfishness of her nature—a defect of a splendid quality—to wish for herself the chief rôle as Frank's consoler, the chief voice in the consultations as to his future.

But in this matter too, as in that of sharing his load with him, her father gave her small place. He concurred entirely with Mrs. Winstone's views, and called at Belgrave Square to thank her for her wise decision. So that Cynthia, eager to fling everything aside, to embrace the outmost limits of sacrifice on her brother's behalf, was compelled to tread the social round with what grace she could summon, and to eat her heart out in impatience for that one daily hour at Francie's side which Sir James could not bring himself to forbid. During those visits, she heard scraps of talk and allusions to foreign lands, and finally of South Africa as Frank's settled destination.

When he got a little over his first remorse, as he quickly did with her—though with his father he was never at his ease—Frank talked a great deal about his new life, and with an eager, almost pleasurable expectation that was yet another hurt to this poor, sensitive Cynthia. When she hinted wistfully that it was so far away, he said almost roughly, 'So much the better'; and then, melting at her evident pain, 'there's nobody but you will

care a straw, Cynthia—the farther the better for them!’

It was with this mournful conviction strong in her mind that she one day walked with her father from the lodgings to Belgrave Square. Even this dearest father never loved Francie as she did—would not mourn him with half the grief. Perhaps he read that transparent young face better than she guessed.

‘Cynthy,’ he said, ‘you know that when your brother leaves us I am going home.’

‘And I with you, father!’ she said quickly.

‘My dear, it was to tell you that is not my wish that I have asked you to walk with me to-day; Mrs. Winstone and I are both agreed that it is best you should remain here, as we originally planned, till the season is over.’

‘Oh, father!’ said Cynthia, dismayed and deeply hurt, the tears smarting in her eyes, ‘don’t ask me to do that! I can’t, I can’t!’

‘I know from your point of view it sounds heartless,’ he said, ‘but you must let me be wise for you in this, my daughter. Your young life must not be overshadowed because your brother has chosen to waste his. I know you will tell me you cannot enjoy yourself, and it is my grief that you must suffer as we must all suffer when one of our own name and blood forsakes righteousness and forgets honour. But think, Cynthia—the

indulgence of your grief might be a relief to you, but would it be an honest return for the kindness that has been shown you? Mrs. Winstone has welcomed you warmly to her house and home, and her kind heart too, I think. She has made engagements on your behalf that would have had no attraction for her; she has sacrificed some inclinations, spent time and thought and money to give you pleasure. Can you not give up something for her?’

Cynthia strove with herself for a moment. Ah, how much harder a thing was this than the splendid renunciations she had planned! but if duty lay along this uphill, narrow track rather than on the shining heights of service?

‘I will try,’ she said, and tried valiantly there and then to smile, though her heart was full of tears.

‘That is right! that is my good Cynthy!’ he patted her hand. ‘You know,’ he smiled the mere ghost of his old, whimsical smile, ‘I have always told you that society is the best possible execution-ground for the crucifixion of small personal desires and particular personal interests. The men and women we meet—with the exception of a few rare souls—care nothing for the frets and worries or the hobbies and fancies that pass them by; as you go through life you will find that your neighbour would generally prefer you to be all ear while he

is all tongue! Even if one can't arrive at that height of self-abnegation, it is something gained if in our intercourse with each other we learn sufficient self-control to bear our private griefs so that they need shadow nobody else, and enjoy our particular pleasures without insisting that they must be other people's pleasures too.'

'I know what you mean,' said Cynthia, grasping the lesson courageously with both hands. 'And—and I *will* try not to vex Mrs. Winstone, father.'

'Her kindness will meet you half-way—she will expect no miracles of you, my Cynthy; but her worldly wisdom decrees that you should not retire abruptly, and so perhaps set curiosity afloat'—He paused with evident pain, then spoke again, his voice deepened with emotion. 'For myself, I have sometimes felt that publicity, if the sharpest, might yet be the most wholesome lesson; but I have been taught, in a way that has greatly moved me, that my poor boy's chances may not yet be all over.'

They were walking slowly round the enclosure in the square. Cynthia grasped his arm and held it close.

'Archie has left it to me to tell you, Cynthia, that he is going abroad with your brother.'

'Archie!' Her mind had room at the moment for nothing but astonishment.

'I need not say, I think, that if he had consulted

me, I should strenuously have opposed this scheme. What right have I or mine to take the best years of his life, his position, his hopes of rising in his profession, and sacrifice them to what is too likely to be a hopeless task'—

'No, dear father, no! You said just now Francie's life was not all over.'

'If it has any new beginning, he will owe it to the best and most generous of friends. Colquhoun had settled everything before he spoke. He is leaving the army: he has money, as you know, or will have it soon; his success here was assured, but he is throwing everything up to stand by your brother. Ah, Cynthia,' he sighed, 'he was a happy man who called him son!'

'It is splendid!' said Cynthia, beginning to glow. 'Oh, father, it will not seem like sending Francie away, if Archie is to go with him! And I see now—we must be brave, and not let them go under any cloud. It is just like Archie—to settle everything so quietly and say nothing—not even to me!' This struck her the next moment as a less pleasing circumstance. 'And he would hate to have a fuss made, as if he were doing a great thing.'

"Greater love than this hath no man," murmured Sir James to himself.

Cynthia thought on in silence. She had, much to her surprise, seen Archie in a new light in London drawing-rooms, as a considerable personage,

sought after by mammas with many daughters; but this was the Archie she knew, the faithful Jonathan. But he might have told her himself. Then, in one sudden, dismaying, perturbing stroke, came the thought—how she should miss him! He had always been there—always her friend—her helper. And now—he was going away!

‘Of course he will talk this over with you,’ said Sir James, waking out of his sad reverie, ‘and if you can find any way to thank him, Cynthia, you had better use it.’

CHAPTER XX



OPPORTUNITY for talk, however, there seemed to be none. Cynthia's visits were, under her increasing engagements, necessarily irregular; it was the barest chance if Archie, now seeing to the outfit of clothes, saddles, etc., were found at the lodgings; at times even Frank was out. She could not but be glad he had got over his morbid shrinking from the outside world, and yet it came home to her that that shut door was typical of her waning influence. Even Francie wanted her no more.

Her spirits went up with a bound, however, and rose to a pitch for which it was difficult to account, when one morning Mitchell brought, with the early tea, a scribbled pencil-note from Archie.

'Found in the letter-box, miss,' said Mitchell, with evident disapproval of the unstamped envelope.

Cynthia read its contents eagerly. Archie would present himself at Lady Mary's that night: would Cynthia keep some dances for him? He might be late.

She made him liberal allowance, but when she at last saw him edging his way through the crowd at the door she shrank unaccountably from the meeting to which she had so eagerly looked forward, and instantly gave to another one of the waltzes she had been jealously keeping for him. At its close she found him at her side.

'You look tired,' he said; 'couldn't we sit out this?' He took her card. 'It's mine, I see,' he smiled.

She was panting a little, but protested she was not tired.

'I hate sitting on the stairs, and there's nowhere else.'

But he found a quiet corner, where, even in the middle of the throng, they could talk undisturbed.

'You see, Cynthy,' he said, as he turned about a great palm, so that the finger-like leaves might not touch her hair, 'my time for talking is so awfully short, and you can dance any night when we're gone.'

'Why don't you say "dance for joy"? Don't you see I'm wearing black for you already?'

But the flippant tone was an unworthy effort she could not sustain. Her grey eyes filled with tears.

'It's just because there's so much to say, and because I've no words to say it—no words to thank you with'—

'Hush,' he said cheerfully; 'that's all rubbish between you and me! *You* know, Cynthy, that



He found a quiet corner where they could talk undisturbed.

I couldn't get along without old Frank—we've been such chums from the first. It would have ended anyway in my pitching everything overboard and going out to him, so we may as well start together.'

'With the prospect of foreign service — and probably active service!' she shook her head in mournful disbelief.

'Well, it will be active service out yonder! You know, Cynthy, or perhaps you don't know, that, beyond a small allowance, I don't come in for anything my father left me till I'm twenty-five? It has been awfully tight work to get along sometimes, so you see I'm not giving up any kind of position here. I'd have had to chuck the army anyway when I came in for Colquhoun, so I don't see how I could possibly do better than fill up the time by seeing a bit of the world. We'll have to rough it, and be regular colonists, but that won't hurt us. If you think of it that way, you'll see what a jolly lucky chance this is for me!'

'If I think of it!' she said passionately. 'What else have I been thinking of all these dreary days except that from the very first hour we knew you I've leaned on you and trusted you, and expected you to do things for me, and you've done them, with never even a thank-you! And you can't make *me* believe—though I think you're the most unselfish man that ever lived—that you're giving up nothing, sacrificing nothing.'

'No,' he said, seized on by her emotion, and interrupting her. 'You're right. There is one thing that makes the going away a black business, and that's the leaving you behind. We've been friends so long, and if you could think of me in another way — if, when I come back — why, I'd give my life to serve you, Cynthia.' He spoke brokenly, inartificially, but she could not misread his agitation, the dire earnestness of his blue eyes. Her own filled with sudden light. Here was the explanation of all her late mysterious feelings, her longing to meet him, her shyness when they met, her bewildering sense of pain at the thought that he was going out of her life. Love? She looked at it with reverent, awe-stricken gaze. It came to her in no new guise; it wore the face of an old, old friend, transformed, indeed, but beneath the new shining she discerned the old rock of her defence, the sure trust that had never failed her.

'It was always you, Archie—next to Francie, always you,' she said simply, 'and lately I think—I am sure'—the sudden blood came up and made a war of roses red and white in her cheek, and he read his answer there.

'It's all wrong, you know,' said Mrs. Winstone, as she stood that night with Cynthia in her bedroom, 'all wrong, my dear,' but she kissed the girl while she shook her diamond tiara; 'you had no

business to get engaged at the very beginning of your first season; it's against all rules and regulations! Fortunately, Master Archie's hands are tied, and you are both of you such babies, you have time to change your minds twice over within the next two years.'

'It may be more than two years,' said Cynthia softly, looking with absent eyes into the future. In her heart she was saying, 'It will be just as long as it takes to make Francie into a good, brave man.'

'Now, now, now!' Mrs. Winstone fairly coruscated light from her jewels in the energy of her admonition, 'what ridiculous piece of quixotry are you planning in your foolish head? Take your Archie when you can get him, my dear, unless you see someone you like better in the meantime. There is nothing in this world more foolish than useless self-sacrifice, Cynthia; nine times out of ten you pay the price of your own happiness, and gain nothing by the barter for another.'

True, perhaps, from the world's angle of vision, but there are some rare souls to whom the counsels of God are clear, and steadfastness, patience, and self-forgetting qualities not to be left out of life's calculations, even at the cost of all that makes life itself most dear.

'And I pray,' said Cynthia, as she lay awake in the happy dark, 'that God will make me as brave as He has made Archie true, so that I may never

tempt him to leave undone the work to which he has given himself.'

It was a comfort to her to know that she had her father's entire approval, and that the thought of her engagement did something to lighten the cloud that lay heavily on the hearts at home.

Grandmamma wrote in a hand grown shaky with age, but with her grand manner peeping out in every letter, and sent Cynthia her blessing. 'I always intended you to marry Archibald Colquhoun,' she said, 'and I am glad that I have lived to see *one* prayer of mine fulfilled.'

'I hope she didn't order you to marry me!' she said to her lover, blushing with an uncomfortable realisation of grandmamma's methods.

'I'm afraid it would not have helped me if she had!' he laughed.

'She is dreadfully hurt about Francie,' she said, with a sigh. 'Her pride was so bound up in him, all her ambitions lived again in him, and now that she is old, it is so difficult to make her understand *why* he has left the army. She thinks it mere caprice.'

'Better so, Cynthia.'

'Perhaps; but in some ways it will hurt her more. She always had a great deal of sympathy with Francie's scrapes and difficulties when he was a boy. I wish father would let him run down to say good-bye to her, but he won't hear of it.'

'You'll have to do our good-byes for us—mine too—for I always think of Fordedge as home. I'll persuade Frank if I can to write one of his jolly long letters to Lady Considine. You know what a good hand he is at description, and that kind of thing. He always sees twice as much as I do in anything we look at together.'

'Yes, he'll write when the mood takes him, and it will be a pleasure to pour himself out,' she said with sad prescience, 'and we'll all think it such a wonderful thing that he should think of us at all! Sometimes I have thought that we hinder a weak nature from growing stronger by expecting too little of it; and yet,' she sighed, 'if we had all our lives to live over again day by day, I don't think I could do anything else but just love Francie, whatever he did or left undone! And you, Archie, you are just the same!'

'I can never be to him what you've been, Cynthy,' said the simple fellow, moved as he thought of her unwavering devotion, 'but he's the only chum I've ever had, and we'll stand by each other.'

'And your letters will be my comfort—I know they'll not wait on any mood! Oh dear! I wish I were going home, where I could enjoy them and answer them in peace and quietness! It's the very hardest thing father ever asked of me—to stay on here and pretend to amuse myself, when I know he

must be missing me nearly as much as I miss him! I am glad he has Kitty, but—I hope it isn't very horrid—I don't like to think that Kitty quite takes my place.'

'I don't see how she possibly could!' said the partial lover, 'but she'll do her best to cheer them up till you go back.'

'I must stir her up to write oftener, lazy little thing! Just one scrap since she had our great news!'

Mrs. Winstone relented sufficiently to give the young couple every possible opportunity of meeting during the few short days before the friends sailed. Once when she had a chance word alone with Archie, she said—

'I've always thought you had the qualities that make a good soldier, Archie, but I never imagined I should have to regard you in the light of a hero—the hero of a girl's novel! But since you've made up your mind to be romantic, I won't deny that young Considine has a less hopeless chance of righting himself with the world, since he has managed to secure your co-operation.'

'Don't you think that!' he remonstrated hotly. 'I'm doing this entirely off my own bat! Frank did his utmost to dissuade me.'

'And then yielded gracefully!' she said drily. 'I wouldn't tell a falsehood, even to save Cynthia pain, but if people like to think you are two young rebels, tired of discipline and bitten with a desire

for adventure, I suppose you would prefer it to their thinking—the truth—that your friend is a worthless young prodigal, and that you are doing a quixotically foolish and utterly impossible thing in attempting to reform him. I have lived a good many years in the world, and I have seen what I have seen. A man who cheats at cards has signed his own social death-warrant as surely as if he had committed murder. It is the unpardonable sin, and God knows we're not squeamish or over-scrupulous! You'll never open the old door for Frank Considine again, Archie; you'll only find it shut roughly in your own face too, if you try.'

'I don't care a hang what the world says or thinks!' he answered slowly, 'but I do care that you, whom I've known since I was a kid, and who are Cynthia's friend, should look at this thing in the right way. And—and—you who are a good woman—and go to church, and say your prayers—it's not like you to forbid a fellow another chance. I can't preach, and I don't want to, but the chap you were speaking of, the chap in the parable—found his way back to the father's house—and was met on the road.'

'My dear,' she said, with tears in her eyes, 'I'm a faithless old woman, and you've a right to rebuke me. God bless your enterprise, and bring it to a good end! I'll take every care of your Cynthia,' she went on more lightly, 'and won't let her mope.'

We must send you off with all your colours flying. Oh, you don't know what a model of discretion I am! I've managed so that never a hint of this ridiculous rumour about her father and that little Kitty Terry should reach her. She'll have enough to bear, poor child, when you go.'

'Sir James and Kitty!' said Archie, with slow bewilderment.

'My dear boy, don't glower at me! Stranger things have happened.'

Archie reddened, then laughed. 'I could get into a rage if it was worth while, but it isn't. If you knew everything— Anyway, take my word for it, it's a base, abominable bit of gossip. Cynthia thinks all the world of her father, and with good reason, and though she would laugh, it would hurt her that people could be so impertinent.'

'I have told you she shall not know if I can help it.'

But by an entirely unforeseen accident Cynthia did learn the rumour which idle tongues were spreading. It reached her in the bluntest way some three weeks after Frank and Archie had sailed, and though at first she rejected it with indignant scorn, the wound it left rankled, as Archie had foreseen. She went to Mrs. Winstone with a white face and burning eyes.

'Do you know what they are saying—about father?' she demanded.

'I am sorry you know, my child.'

'Oh, you have heard too!' said Cynthia miserably.

'I must go home.'

'I hoped you would never hear this gossip, but I never thought you would believe it, Cynthia!'

'I don't, I don't!' she said wildly, 'but I hate the life that leads to such talk, and about father, whose heart was buried with my young, beautiful mother! Oh, forgive me. I'm very ungrateful, I fear, but I have tried, and I can't keep down the longing for home!'

'If you feel like that, you shall go, Cynthia.'

CHAPTER XXI



M I jealous?' said Cynthia to herself, as the train bore her homewards through the green summer world. 'Am I jealous—of Kitty?' Conscience seemed to answer in the affirmative, to her chagrin, for Cynthia had thought herself pretty familiar with her own weak points, and armed against them; but here was a failing upon which she had never reckoned in setting up her spiritual defences. When she reviewed her conduct during the last few days—the hot haste in which she had packed; the leap of her thoughts towards home; her ill-concealed impatience to get there, that she might see for herself the extent of Kitty's perfidy—she was forced to own that she had taken the ugly passion to her bosom. Not that for a moment she credited the whisper that gave her father, in Kitty, a new wife. She flushed at the bare thought of that insult to her mother's memory, to her father's faithfulness—her young mother, whom she thought of always as 'numbered with the saints'; whom her father would

never cease to mourn till he joined her, one with her again, 'in glory everlasting.' The wound was a personal one, for if Kitty had stolen her place in her father's affections, she surely had a right to resent it?

'Kitty will comfort him,' Archie had said—Kitty, who herself had needed and received comfort for some mysterious sorrow in the garden at Lucerne. While Cynthia was dancing in London, was her friend usurping her rights at home—her claim to be her father's comrade and companion, the sharer of his thoughts and fancies? The possibility made her heart burn with a pain that was almost unbearable; she scarce knew whether to hate herself or Kitty most. It was a relief to find that no one met her at the station, so that she might have time to compose her face and control the reins of feeling.

Her father sent her a message of regret by the groom that his duties on the Bench prevented him from meeting her, and at the rectory gate she turned aside her head, perhaps to hide the tears that would spring at the thought of this strange and lonely return. Had she looked, she might have discerned a wistful face at an upper window, but pride ruled, and Cynthia's smiles and nods were all for her humble village friends. She had time to unpack and to unfold the whole budget of her news to Lady Considine before her father returned. Grandmamma was growing deaf, but had indignantly

scouted the suggestion of an ear-trumpet, and conversation with her was rather exhausting. Cynthia's throat ached, between the strain of talk and the repressed desire to cry. When she heard her father's step, she sprang away to meet him in the library. Her heart could not help beating; she had opened so many new doors into her own nature since they parted that she felt as if she must make his acquaintance all over again; but when he came in, looking grey and weary, but with his old, kind smile, she was moved to forget everything but her longing for him. She buried her head on his shoulder, and cried as she had not cried since she was a child.

'Why, my child,' he said, greatly disturbed, 'what is all this? Are you so sorry to come home, or—has the parting been so hard?'

'Oh, I wasn't thinking of Archie,' she sobbed, 'though I miss him every minute. It was you—it was'—

He lifted her chin with one hand and looked into her blurred face. 'Come,' he said, 'those eyes have never deceived me yet; they have your great-aunt's trick of honesty. Let me see if I can read this riddle for myself!'

But with his arm about her the need of confession was like a thirst, and she told him everything.

He was silent for a moment or two. 'Poor

Kitty!' he said at last. 'I am sorry you misjudged her. Did your own happy romance not teach you that there might be some love stories that must begin and end in pain? What there is to tell, Kitty shall tell you herself. You must go to her—and I think you will go soon—and, my dear, you don't need me to remind you that we owe it to her—we, who share her burden, to see that we do not fail towards her in patience or tenderness.'

'Oh, father,' said Cynthia brokenly, 'can you forgive me?'

'I'm not quite sure, goosie,' he said playfully, 'but if you will exercise a little more common-sense in the future, I'll try. You are hungry and tired, and the world will look more cheerful to both of us after dinner; but if you sit down with a face like that, grandmamma will be drawing wrong conclusions, too! What a thing it is to manage a household of women!'

After dinner, Cynthia put a shawl round her head and ran over to the rectory. Mrs. Terry, who was alone, received her with warm-hearted rapture, and maintained her cheerfulness when she spoke of Kitty. 'She has a cold, poor little woman, and I have insisted on keeping her in bed, but it will be her best medicine to see you. Will you run up alone, dearie? I'm deep in the flannel-club accounts, and I can't make them come right by any rules of arithmetic known to me!'

Kitty, in a pink dressing-jacket, was curled up like a little squirrel among the blankets, looking as forlorn as if nuts were scarce, but her face flushed with sunlight when she saw Cynthia. No cloud could long eclipse her smiles.

'You'd better not come nearer me, you great London lady!' she cried, waving her hands. 'I'm in the sneezy stage, and it may turn into anything—influenza, pneumonia, anything!'

'You poor little thing!' Cynthia gathered her up in strong and tender arms. 'My kitten, you must let me speak first, for I have a great confession to make.'

But Kitty put a small, pink palm on her lips. 'You didn't understand?' she whispered, 'and you thought me—oh, I deserved that you should think the blackest thoughts!—but, Cynthy, there was nothing to tell, and—I was afraid you would think I had taken Frank from you—and it was all so wretched!'

'I never guessed. What a blind beetle I was! But I wish you had told me, Kitty.'

'Don't make me cry, Cynthy. I do cry in such a horrid way, and I don't feel any better because I've got a red nose! I can't tell you when it began. From the very first summer, I think, when I came home for the holidays. And it went on, in little bits, getting bigger, you know, till somehow it didn't seem fun any more. And it hurt, because

Francie wouldn't let me tell father or mother, and, though I begged him, he wouldn't speak to Sir James. Then Archie guessed it, or Francie told him, and he said to me once, "It would be better to tell, Kitty," and there was that look in his blue eyes that makes you think of honour and duty, in spite of yourself.' Cynthia squeezed her hand. 'And I said, "Can't you help us? You are Francie's friend. Couldn't you smooth the way for him? Sir James will listen to you." I'm afraid it was very selfish, and he looked reluctant, but he said he'd try. Then we were hustled off to Germany, and I was too miserable, for I made Francie promise he wouldn't write. It did seem mean to be having letters when nobody knew, and yet there were days when I'd have fallen to the very bottom of my own self-respect just to have a word! Then Sir James came—and I had to tell him. It's like living in a palace of truth to be with him, and I felt—oh, Cynthy!—I felt just like a base, crawling worm. But I can't tell you how good and kind he was—my own old dad couldn't be kinder, and, though he made me see that Francie had no right to think of—of any woman in that way till he had won his claim to the world's respect, somehow he took the pain out of it by his own perfect chivalry and patience. For, though I meant to be good, I did try him! It's easier now, though it's worse, too, for sympathy does lift the load a little; and father and mother

have been all kindness, too. And sometimes, Cynthy, though the cloud is so black that there isn't a scrap of blue to be seen, I can't help hoping that some day—some day'—

'Hope on, Kitty darling! We'll hope together. I don't believe anyone who has had as much love as Francie has had in his life can fail to grow worthy of it.'

Kitty buried her head in the pillow.

'They say—he has done something wrong,' she said in a low, choked voice; 'even nursie cried and said, "I would sooner see his bonnie head lying on its last pillow!" but—they haven't told me. Oh, Cynthy, you don't believe it, do you? Say you don't!'

'I don't know why he has gone away,' said Cynthia, very sadly. 'Archie told me he was going because the new life would give him a new chance, and do we need to know more? If he has been weak—or even wicked—we shall never remember it against him when he comes back to us a strong, good man. It is hard that we must wait here, when it seems as if we should be able to do so much more if we were with him, but'—her voice dropped—'we can send our prayers after him, Kitty.'

Kitty lifted her head from the pillow to Cynthia's shoulder, and they clung together wordlessly comforting each other. But Kitty was the first to rally. She objected to be miserable, and Cynthia's words

seemed to open new windows to hope. Her elastic mind flew beyond the present, and figured a radiant future.

'We'll have to be awfully busy,' she said; 'they say if you want the time to fly, you should fill up every minute of it. I'm going to have an industrious fit, Cynthia: I'm brimful of schemes. I've got them all written down in a pocket-book somewhere—the most splendid ideas; but even if you could find it, my eyes are too watery to read it out to-night.'

'They must go to sleep, and so must you. I'm going to tuck you up. Oh, I'll share your schemes, kitten, never fear; we'll find lots to do, and there will be the boys' letters.'

'They'll be all for you,' said Kitty, with a return of plaintiveness, 'and it's only Archie who'll write.'

'I'll let you see—bits.' Cynthia blushed as she ran off.

The letters were indeed the chief milestones in lives that would have been monotonous enough, if they had not been filled with affection and duty. Archie was no great scribe, and had always loved his sword better than his pen, but he wrote naturally, with an unselfish desire to spare no detail that could bring comfort to the home circle. He had the keen eye of the born soldier, and missed nothing that was new in scenery or native habit. If the fastidious Sir James, to whom words were as frozen music, made a wry face now and then at the rough-and-ready

style, he could at least praise the graphic quality of Archie's pen. If it were but in crude outline, his pictures lived.

After the long waggon journey to the interior, the young men found themselves at Bulawayo.

'There couldn't be anything much newer in the way of a town,' he wrote, 'for more than half of it exists as yet only in the imagination of the builders. You'll laugh, Cynthia, but it reminds me a good deal—though it's a poor compliment to it—of the camp at Aldershot. Only, instead of straight lines, the little mud shanties with the tin roofs are scattered about as if you had rained them out of a pepper-pot. Tidiness is a virtue which young Africa has had no time to acquire; if the contents of the ash-bucket of every mess kitchen within the lines were contributed, they'd make a poor show here, where every "stand" is strewn with broken bottles and rags and straw and flying papers. As for the dust, it tops everything the old camp could do in that line—and we used to think it hard to beat! When the storm comes whirling down the valley, as it does most days, there's nothing for it but to fling something over your face and cut and run for the nearest shelter. You see, there isn't a yard of pavement in the place, and what, by courtesy, we call streets, are just mud tracks that the sun dries into powder and the wind makes fun of. But it's all in the day's work, and you soon get used to it. They say the

country looks awfully well after the rains, when the maize cobs are ripe in the native fields ; but the heath would seem a blooming garden compared with it now, when the scrub is burnt up to a uniform dingy yellow, and the river beds are mere sandy drifts. But we're as jolly as sand-boys and as hard as nails, and when you're up to the eyes all day in work, you're not too particular about the scenery, so long as you can get a tub and a good square meal and a pipe to finish the day with. We moved into the bachelors' block last week, where we've rented a couple of very decent little rooms with brick floors and canvas ceilings, and a window apiece, and we take it in turns to go to the well, which, by good luck, isn't a hundred yards off. We still board at the hotel, where the food isn't half bad, if the service isn't up to much—but it wouldn't be any fun if you hadn't to rough it.'

'It sounds very dreary,' said Kitty, with a little shiver, 'and think of paying five pounds a month for a mud cabin!'

'There are cabins and cabins,' said Cynthia cheerfully ; 'and soldiers are the neatest and contrivingest creatures in the world. If we could just have a peep, Kitty, we'd find them very snug, I'm sure. You should have seen the camp furniture they took out with them—the boxes that turned themselves into beds or chairs at will, the tables that became shelves, just as if a conjurer were playing tricks with

them—you'd understand what I mean. Soldiers have a kind of instinct—even those who haven't had much experience, like our boys—of making a home out of very little. They learn it because they've got to do it so often, I suppose, and do it quickly if it's to be done at all. Those whitewashed walls will look quite gay with the photographs and pictures and nicknacks hanging on them. Archie was right, I think, when he said they were worth all they cost for carriage, as reminders of home!'

Kitty smiled, and caught the infection of cheerfulness.

'I believe they'll be contriving a garden out of the old meat tins and rag and bone heaps next!' she cried.

CHAPTER XXII



T the end of the first year the rector's preoccupied glances suddenly alighted upon his friend the squire, and discovered him to look—not less upright, indeed, for he always bore himself bravely, but whiter about the temples and more sad about the eyes than his fifty odd years warranted. The dimmer vision of old Joel Burge had made this observation before him.

‘A powerful, auld, larned, elderly gentleman t’ squire be,’ he remarked, halting his wheelbarrow on one side of the rectory gate, while the rector vigorously attacked dandelion roots with his spud on the other, ‘but book wisdom awnly keeps a man awake o’ nights, an’ brings a wisht cloud awver t’ wuld by day. Here I be, the auldest piece up Torbridge, that never knawed nothing ’bout larning, but I lay you he’m the nearest o’ we to t’ worms.’

The rector dug up a refractory root viciously, and tossed it over the gate into Joel’s barrow.

‘Ay, you’re old, Burge,’ he said, ‘but the years

haven't taught you the whole of wisdom yet. Talk of what you know about, my good fellow.'

'T' bloody warriors be fine an' braave thicky spring,' said the old man, with a diplomatic change of topic, 'an' lil missy, she'm powerful set on them. 'Tis the smell of them, most like, coming unbeknownst 'pon t' wind, for they'm naught to look at, if you ax me.'

'Bloody warriors?' said the rector, meditating to himself, as old Joel spat upon his palms and set them to the slow, forward trundling of his barrow. 'Curious, those local names for flowers. What rustic genius first saw the poetry of war—the bloodstains of battle and the fragrance of conquest—in those great bunches of March sweetness?' He plucked a sprig of deep mahogany wallflower and sniffed it thoughtfully as—the spud forgotten—he went back to his study. The homely name fired a train of thought which lay all ready for the kindling spark in his brain. He closed his study door, and, the lock being broken, he took the readiest way of shutting out interruption by piling half a dozen volumes of an ancient encyclopædia against it.

'I'll never ban you for a library of useless knowledge again,' he addressed his fortification with a humorous smile; 'you're good, at least, to keep out lunch and Widow Tallamy,' she being at the moment the rector's particular cross.

It was noticed on the following Sunday that the

rector preached what proved to be the first of a series of very martial sermons, to which his rustic hearers listened more open-mouthed than ever, as he turned himself hither and thither and got hopelessly entangled in his surplice. Usually it was something to watch for to see 't' parson' unknot himself as he came to 'lastly,' but general interest was on this occasion too keenly aroused to be on the outlook for that comfortable word. Even Sir James, who had sometimes sighed in secret for more finished oratory, was carried away by his friend's red-hot earnestness, and forgot to be critical.

It was of battle the rector spoke, but he took the whole of life for his field, and drew many of his illustrations from the achievements of such unready warriors as Mr. Fearing or Mr. Feeblemind. For the great Visionary saw life with inspired eyes when he described it as a pilgrimage in armour, where every step forward has to be won at the point of the sword, and every step backward is made at the cost of a wound. But mostly, though he extolled as with a trumpet the virtues and the victories of heroic souls, the rector, being in a small kind of way a Greatheart himself, showed his sympathy for the weak and the wavering, the cripples and the maimed in that mixed company of river-going folk. 'If any of you'—his alert eyes searched the faces in front of him—'are inclined to sneer at or turn from a neighbour who has been worsted in his spiritual

fight'—(Joel Burge stiffened the veins of his old neck and refrained with an effort from looking round at Tom Brownscombe, the village prodigal)—'I would say to you, take heed to your own defences. For the man who has never been defeated is the man who is already ruined. There is not an unscarred soldier in the great human army. If you think there is, I tell you he has never so much as buckled his armour on. God knows we are not all brave, not all honourable, not all willing, maybe, to make good our losses; not all courageous enough to rise above our discouragements; but if our faith for ourselves, or for those whom we love better than ourselves, fails us, it is something to remember that we cannot outwear the inexhaustible love of Christ—the Captain of our Salvation. Not His love, nor yet His patience. Ah, old Bunyan knew what he was about when he made Ready-to-Halt fling away his crutches on the river's brink. A despised cripple all his life—a soldier at the last, and never a braver—with a soldier's welcome sounding for him on the other side! Oh, my brothers, we must all fall! Pray God we be tender with each other, as He is tender with us; slow to judge, slow to lose hope, as we would plead the everlasting pity, when we too reach our last Jordan.'

Sir James stood alone in the little churchyard when the rector came out of the vestry. His young wife lay among the sleepers, dead, but with the light

of a sure and certain hope in the eyes that looked their last farewell. His own were not upon the mound at his feet, but were gazing over the valley towards the sunset, as if in yonder fires he saw the glory of the Celestial City, and across the stillness heard the clear music of heavenly welcome.

'What news?' said the rector cheerfully, as he joined his friend. 'Kitty made sure there was a mail last evening—but the monkey went off to lunch with Cynthia.'

'Nothing new,' said Sir James, but without the bitterness that had of late crept into his voice. '"To suffer a sea change," Terry, will not make a morally strong man of a weak one, and my poor lad goes upon crutches still. Colquhoun—there's a young Valiant for you—writes with indomitable hopefulness, and follows Frank with the patience of a woman through all his changes and vagaries. The last of them is gold-digging.'

'You think there's a chance? Believers in the country take a very sanguine view of its mineral wealth, I'm told.'

'I had rather it proved one more illusion. Wealth, or even sudden prosperity, would be Frank's ruin.'

'Well, well, they may dig something better than precious metal out of the ground. Adam's curse is a blessing in disguise. I want you to do something for me, squire.'

'Another subscription?'

'No, I'm going to figure rather as a spendthrift than a beggar this time. An old parishioner in India has left me a legacy—ten pounds—to spend on books. That's the condition that goes with the gift. Man! you don't know what it is to feel that you've got to gratify some fancy that lies very near your heart, and may do it without gross selfishness! I want you to go to town with me and help me lay out my wealth. I haven't had a holiday for two years, and may take one with a fairly quiet conscience.'

Sir James smiled, seeing through the kindly little ruse, and rousing himself to say heartily—

'I'll go with you with pleasure, but I don't believe in choosing a man's books for him, any more than I should care to choose his clothes. But my mental wardrobe will be all the better for a new outfit too. Suppose we extend the scheme, and take Mrs. Terry and the girls too? You must let them be my guests, Terry; a week or two of shopping will do them no harm.'

After some protestations and many discussions, the plan was agreed to; an old friend was found willing to cheer Lady Considine's solitude, and Mrs. Terry, her cheeks as pink with excitement as a schoolgirl's, looked over her Indian spoils to renovate her wardrobe, and pulled out her bullock trunks to pack it in. The little holiday was so successful that everybody agreed it must be repeated. Sir James was one of those conscientious people

who have only to recognise some weakness of character to set about its repair. It is easy for the middle-aged to sit down with an accepted grief and let the world go by: not so easy for them to remember the claims of youth, which cannot sorrow for ever. Kitty's brilliant little face, as she saw London under new auspices, from the roomy ease of a carriage, and with a little purse to spend, sent the lesson home. She had folded her petals like the field pimpernel before the storm; here, under the genial influence of change and pleasure, she spread them anew to heaven's light. 'Poor little maid, her cup is easily filled!' Sir James's thoughts of her were all tender. Her nature was sweet and sound, if it touched no deeps or rose to no supreme heights. Hereafter, little Kitty was an indulged person, with a box of books from Mudie's, an occasional week at the sea, and a whole season in town. The last she owed to Cynthia's diplomacy, and indeed it took no little art to persuade Mrs. Winstone to substitute Kitty for herself.

'You know I wasn't in the least a success,' she said, 'and Kitty will be. She is so pretty and so winning, and she will enjoy herself immensely. You'll like that, for you love to make people happy.'

'It's absurd,' said the lady, yielding a little. 'It will only make the little thing discontented. Of

course'—she looked at Cynthia sharply—'I might find her a husband.'

Cynthia laughed. 'Kitty is loyal,' she said; 'she will not change.'

'But she can amuse herself with the courtiers till the king chooses to return,' said Mrs. Winstone drily; 'whereas you prefer to sit at home and mope.'

'I don't know about moping! Father and I have great old times together, and there aren't many busier people in Devon!'

'All the same, your Miss Kitty is the wiser. You are thinner, Cynthia, and you look too grave, my dear. Tell me, how long is this farce of waiting to go on? Archie comes into his own this year; will you still condemn him to exile?'

Cynthia, who was taking tea at Belgrave Square, pulled off her glove. 'Look!' she said, displaying an engraved gold band on her third finger, under Archie's diamonds. 'He sent me a little lump of gold—his first—to make into a ring.'

'If it had been a wedding-ring, there would have been some sense in it. My poor child, you are wasting your youth on a dream!'

Cynthia stooped forward and kissed the warning lips. She was smiling bravely.

'You will have Kitty?' she coaxed. 'You'll be very good to her? You know it is as hard for her as it is for me.'

'No, it isn't!' said Mrs. Winstone obstinately; 'but you may send her. We ought to get on, for she appears to have some common-sense.'

While Kitty was in town, Nurse Bruce died. She had been failing for some time, and faded out of life with little pain. At the end, her mind became clouded, and was happily busy with old times, the sting of Francie's absence forgotten. Her talk, indeed, was of a longer past than any Cynthia could remember, and it gave her a strange thrill of sadness to realise that nursie took her for her own young mother.

'It's a boy, Miss Margaret, darling'—her old hands were fumbling with the pillow, holding it close to her bosom—'a son to grow up tall and straight, and be a joy to ye all the days of his life. And it's your yellow hair he's got, and blue eyes the very marrow of your own. And won't my dear mistress be proud when she takes him in her arms, her own little grandson? Hush, then, my dawtie, hush ye! Nursie's got ye safe.'

'Oh, nursie, don't you know me?' pleaded Cynthia, her tears falling.

Nursie's dim eyes rested wistfully on the girl's face; they were clouded with momentary trouble.

'You've changed, Miss Margaret, dear—my lady I should say—and the water's standing in your eyes. Oh, whisht, whisht, for the bairn is sleeping in my arms, and tears should never fall on a young

child's face. Ay, smile upon him, little lamb, for he'll be the joy of your youth and the strength of your age, and it's a proud man his father will be of him yet.'

'Pray God that may come true!' Cynthia murmured.

Nursie was silent awhile, dozing lightly. Her hands fell apart inertly, and Cynthia softly released the pillow. By and by, she roused herself and spoke clearly—

'Fold your hands, then, and shut your eyes, Master Francie, and pray God bless your dear papa, and your little sister; your pretty mamma's in heaven, my lamb, and may the dear God make you good, so that you may go there too when you die!'

And so, with the old, familiar tender injunction upon her lips, she fell into the last sleep.

CHAPTER XXIII



ELEGRAMS flashed rumours of approaching trouble in Matabeleland, and letters from the boys were anxiously awaited.

During that summer, when Archie should have been celebrating his accession to Colquhoun with Highland honours, he and Francie were at work at Maygrove's Store, a dozen miles from Bulawayo. He wrote light-heartedly.

'The witch doctors hurl everything at the white man's head, of course; rinderpest, the locust plague, drought—he's the scapegoat for everything; but the natives have learned their lesson, and they'll remain loyal. Don't you believe any nonsense to the contrary. We're as safe as if we were in Devon.'

'Hum!' said the rector, to whom Kitty had imparted this information. He was walking among his flowers, and he addressed them. 'Maybe so, but I don't like this wholesale removal of the police force to the Transvaal.' He nodded at his columbines: 'Seems to me a little too trusting.'

And in the evening breeze the swaying columbines nodded back.

But, as the months went on, there seemed to be no justification for this pessimistic view, and, anxiety lulled, Cynthia and her father had leisure to mature a plan which had already been discussed. It grew out of a visit they had paid together to granny's little home, on the afternoon of Nurse Bruce's funeral. Instinctively their steps had turned that way, for the thought of nursie's faithful service was bound up with every memory of the dear, dead granny.

'How the trees have grown!' said Cynthia; on the dull, windless autumn day they could hear the thud of fallen apples in the little orchard; 'and the creepers she planted are almost up to the chimneys now.'

'I have sometimes thought it a pity it should stand empty,' said her father.

'Oh,' she said quickly, 'you wouldn't let it, would you, dear?'

'It will be yours one day, Cynthy; it is yours now, if you can think of any way of using it that wouldn't be a wound to your grandmother's memory.'

Cynthia sat down upon a little stone bench half embedded in laurels. He watched her changing face.

'What is it?' he said at last, as she looked up and smiled.

'I am thinking of something granny once said. She was speaking of the alabaster box of ointment. She said it had been called by a great writer, "the most beautiful of all the appreciations," because it was broken over our Saviour's feet while He was still living. I did not understand her at the time, but I think I know what she meant now. Oh, daddy, you are right, you are right! We'll not wait until it is too late, until those we might have helped are in their graves, and our alabaster box will not do their poor cold clay any good. Granny's home might be a resting-place for sorrowful people who have their cross to carry still, their Calvary, perhaps, to face. Was that what you meant?' She rose and passed her arm through his, leading him down the tangled path. 'Was that the thought you had in your mind, father?'

'Something like it, perhaps, if it could be done wisely; but remember, Cynthia, you are planning to give away what you might one day look to as a resting-place for yourself. The little home has always been the dower-house of the Considine women.'

She laughed and blushed. 'I suppose that I shall be a Colquhoun woman some day, and that Archie will give me a rooftree! And meantime, daddy, I should like to think of it as a little haven for some sad people who would reach it by the Peace Way, and find among granny's flowers a rest

"from the noise and the hurryings of this life." It is yours; if you give it me, may we do that with it?'

And that was what they eventually did, though not till they had borne their own cross together.

Early in the year came the first note of real alarm. Reports were contradictory, but rumour was again busy with the whisper that the chief indunas were only waiting their time to shed the white man's blood. But so little credence was given to this on the spot that Archie's letters made no allusion to it. The little handful of white men scattered over the inhospitable land were lulled into security. With what seems now, in the retrospect, the most reckless if also the most chivalrous disregard of danger, they stripped themselves even of such support as they might have claimed from the native police force, each man standing alone, confident, in his British pluck, of his ability to protect his own.

Archie's letter from Maygrove's Stores was specially cheerful. The call of spring was in his blood; hope was flowering again. Frank was 'wiring in': he was well and jolly, and taking to the life better than before. Only by such hopeful sentences as these could one skilled to read between the lines guess at the times when Frank had not been brave, had not 'wired in': when even the most dogged patience, the most unselfish devotion, had almost failed.

On the back of this came another and much more hurried scrawl, written piecemeal, and this time the jubilant note was even more apparent; it rose soaringly above all possibility of danger, for was there not, at least, a chance of 'brave employment' for the soldier's sword?

'There's been a bit of a brush over at the mines—nothing to be alarmed at, but a lot of the native police have been persuaded to join the rebels, and, merely as a precaution, it has been decided to disarm the rest. It seems a shame, for a lot of them are "friendlies," as we've good reason to know. 'There isn't a sign of a row here—as quiet as the grave, and we could defend ourselves easily enough if there was any need; but they are enrolling chaps to look after the women and kids in Bulawayo, and Frank and I have joined the Field Force. You see, we couldn't be left out of the fun, Cynthy; but though it's only playing at war, you should see what it has done for old Frank! He looks A1 on horseback, and is in tip-top spirits. It is good to have a chance at the old life! We've had the good luck to get pretty fair mounts; horses are awfully scarce in the country since the horse-sickness. . . . We rode in yesterday, going round by Jasper's Stores, which we had heard had been looted. Poor old Jasper had got his quietus. He stayed behind the waggon when his wife and sister trekked on, to try and leave things

secure. The women, thank God, are safe! We stopped to bury him. Judging by the spoor, there must have been a lot of the Kaffirs at the ugly work.

' . . . We've made a strong laager here in Market Square. A good many men have been drafted off to the forts, and others for active work. Horses aren't very much good—and just as well, since there are so few—as all fighting is done over broken, rocky ground. We have volunteered, but no luck. However, it isn't bad fun, laagering behind our saddles and cooking our own rations. Hunger sauce makes even bully beef and biscuit taste splendiferous. The enemy keeps a respectful distance, worse luck!

' . . . Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah! a stroke of fortune at last! Both told off to join skirmishing party—Black's Scouts. Just off. God bless you, my own Cynthia! Say our bit of the Litany for us; keep up a brave heart, my lassie. God willing, Frank shall come back to you without a scratch.'

The bloody warriors were in bloom again, and their fragrance came in with the spring breeze to the rector's little study, where he sat with an idle pen in his hand. It brought back, as scents will, lost or mislaid memories. His eyes turned involuntarily towards a pile of old sermons on his

writing-table. He sometimes turned the pile to select a favourite, for a village audience can stand a vast amount of repetition, and be all the brighter for it; but he had no heart now to pick out those martial addresses he had written and delivered with so much fire a year or more ago. For the wall-flowers were late, and it was April, and the little church shone gold with Lent lilies for Easter. The Festival of Hope—the Church's Joy Day—found hearts distracted with anxiety at hall and rectory. The lips that prayed 'for all those in danger, necessity, or tribulation,' faltered over the petition, not knowing, indeed, whether it were not offered too late for any earthly deliverance. All the pulses of village pride had been stirred by the news that the 'braave' young gentlemen had a hand in that far-off fighting; but the rector saw the glory blurred through Kitty's tears.

'God save their youth and spare their gallantry for their country's service,' the rector prayed, slipping down upon his knees, 'or send us acquiescence in His decree, if He has a better use for them elsewhere!'

Peace, in the certainty of life which survives all death, came to him as he knelt in that most quiet hour of early morning. The birds filled up the silence with song, the murmur of infinite young leaves and swelling buds made a minor music. Nature knows no preferences, takes no sides, yet

surely there was some reconciling influence in the air, an ally in the wind stirring the blossoming branches? Then, with the familiar abruptness which made him smile when it did not make him wince, a single note smote his ear, followed by a hurrying, stumbling triplet, and ending with a clash of discord, as the bells broke out.

'Christ is risen!' they proclaimed, 'Christ is risen!' and from the tower across many miles of wood and moorland came the antiphonal response, 'Therefore let us keep the Feast.'

In that same April weather, while the soft rains were ripening the maize cobs, and turning the wilderness into a fruitful valley, Bulawayo was writing its history in an increasing row of graves; men's graves, and for the most part those of men in life's earliest prime. The story of gallant attack (for the native was no mean foe) and of still more gallant repulse, considering how few and unused to war were the defenders, has been told elsewhere, but in every battle there are some unrecorded heroisms which never reach the ear of the historian. One such piece of pluck was matter of common talk among the little community of citizens and strangers very uncomfortably huddled together in Bulawayo, and it had been discussed in all its bearings before the person perhaps chiefly concerned knew anything about it.

But one day he opened his eyes and made several

astonishing discoveries; that he was in a strange room, that his head was bandaged, and that a kind, stout woman was supporting it with one hand while with the other she offered him a cup of soup.

But the soup was not what he wanted, and he waved it aside. What was it that he did want? His brow was contracted in a puzzled frown; then out of the dim cloud that obscured his brain a thought shaped itself. He sat up and spoke sharply.

‘Considine. Where is he?’

‘Hush, then, lie quiet; though sure it’s good to hear ye talk sense again.’ He’s in the next room to yourself.’

‘Why isn’t he here? Is he—he isn’t hurt?’

Archie’s blue eyes, looking very large and ghostly in his white face, devoured hers. Memory was surging back.

‘We went to reinforce Jenkinson’s — we got separated from the others in the bush. I remember it all now. A chance shot from one of those beggars bowled my horse over. Frank insisted on my mounting along with him. And then—and then—I suppose I got this knock on the head, for it’s all a blank.’

‘Yes, and that’s the truth. Now then, take this soup,’ she coaxed, ‘or it’s never a word more I’ll be letting ye talk.’

‘I won’t, unless you tell me everything straight

out,' he said, with the petulance of a child and the craft of an invalid.

'Oh, me poor boy!' She was a soft creature, with no qualifications for her self-imposed task except exceeding goodness of heart, and she was melting over him already. 'It's more than we ever thought for to see the face of ye again, and now if ye'd only lie quiet and get the strength back into ye'—

A movement of impotent wrath and anguish frightened her.

'Sure, if ye'll be good I'll not keep it from ye, then, though I could bite me tongue out for telling it, and you like a baby for strength! You were three days out, the two of ye, lost in the veldt, an' skulking behind rocks to escape thim brown devils, and, from what we can make of the tale, you were off your head the most of the time—you've had a sharp touch of the fever since. But the young gintleman—bless him!—never left ye. He held ye on his horse, leading the baste, and fed ye on mealies and looked after ye as if he'd been the mother of ye. And then, when he had found the track, and you were almost in camp again—oh, praise be to the blessed saints that sent our boys that way to find ye before it was too late!'

'To find me!' said Archie, with the bitterest scorn, the profoundest grief. 'And my friend, my brother! Oh, Cynthy, Cynthy, must I tell you I have failed?'

'They found him too. And—it's alive he is still.' She burst into irrepressible tears; and so the black truth came home to him.

With sudden strength he flung the clothes from him and staggered to his feet. 'I'm going to him,' he said.

'Is it mad ye are, then?' she cried; but before she could hinder his wild purpose the door was flung open, and a voice that forgot to subdue its gaiety cried out—

'Good news, Mrs. Byrne, grand news! The hero isn't going to give us the slip after all! Moore says it's next door to a miracle, but Considine's taken a turn for the better.'

'Sure, I thought he wouldn't be standing that,' said Mrs. Byrne, laughing and crying in a breath, but both for joy, as she held out her capacious arms while the unconscious Archie slid gracefully into them; 'an' him a baby for weakness; but it's no more than a faint, and it isn't joy that would be killing him! It'll keep him quiet in his bed, an' that's a mercy, annyway!'

CHAPTER XXIV



H, Harum darling, there's only you and me and mother left to talk about him, and I think you understand best, though your dear doggie eyes are rather dim. But your bit of a tail is just as good as ever at thumping, only you'll wear it out, my doggums, if you wag it for joy so soon! Cock up your ear, and I'll whisper a secret. I dreamt last night that the Shandon Castle was to reach Southampton to-day. Cynthia said in yesterday's letter it was sure to be in this week, and to-day's Thursday, Harum, so there are only two more days left. Cynthia was to telegraph, unless father did, and she'll be sure to do it, because she knows father's way of forgetting till it's just one minute too late. And that's why we're here, you and me, sitting on the step of the old dial, because we can see the telegraph boy quickest from here—but you'll bark when you hear him—and because—because Francie said, "Tell Kitty I'd like to meet her best in the old kitchen garden, where I saw her first, perched in the medlar

tree like a little pink bird." We can't climb medlar trees now, Harum, or at least we mustn't! but you see I've got a new pink frock, to be like the old one.' Kitty had shed so many tears that but few were left to fall on the head of the old dog—the survivor of her four-footed friends—but they came from a healed and grateful heart. Sorrow—deep as it was—had not embittered her nature, and joy could not spoil it. 'I'm crying now, Harum, because there isn't to be a single tear when he comes home. Why should we cry because he has proved himself—as I always knew he would—a brave, unselfish man? I did try to be brave too, my doggie, and I think—I humbly hope, if God had wished him to die, I'd still have been able to be glad that he saved Archie, and so paid back his debt of love to him and Cynthia. But when that good Irishwoman wrote and said how ill they had both been, and how she'd have written before if she'd known where to send a letter, and how the doctor thought hopefully of Francie, though he was so terribly wounded—oh, you're only a doggie, Harum, and even you can't know the floods of joy that letter brought! Cynthia and I *danced* round the old nursery, though she has been looking so old and so grave all these months, as if she'd never dance again! (You should have been there to bark at our heels.) Sir James shut himself for hours in his study, but father and I just hugged each other,

and we both said in a breath, "What does it matter about his empty sleeve, and the scar across his face; when we're getting all the very best of him back again?"

"It's his sword arm," said Sir James, when we met him that evening in the Peace Way, and he sighed, though the lines were faded out of his face, and he looked quite ten years younger. And he put his hand upon my shoulder, and said in his kindest way, "You'll have to be his amanuensis, Kitty"—just as if he knew I'd been sitting up at nights practising, to try and make my scrawly writing a little neater. And father put his arm within the squire's—they've been such close friends—like Cynthia and me—these last years, and said something in his Sunday voice, when he's very earnest and his eyes shine and his hair gets ruffled; but it was in Latin, so, of course, a little *ignoramus* like me couldn't be expected to understand it. But it must have been something comforting, for Sir James smiled, and said, "Yes, yes, don't think I'm repining. This brings him home, and if it keeps him at home and makes him content with his father's house, I shall have little more to ask for."

'Then they began to plan about going to Southampton, and father said he wouldn't be left behind, and he worried them so to set off—but I think he was quite right—that in the end they went in such a hurry that Cynthia forgot her gloves, and hadn't

time to change her gardening frock. But I don't suppose Archie will care! He'll only see that she's grown into a very beautiful, grave, calm woman, and now, perhaps, she will learn to smile more, and feel that she doesn't need to spend all her life comforting other people.'

At this stage of Kitty's meditations, her canine friend worked his ears uneasily, and then, detecting the approach of the enemy—having a firmly rooted prejudice against all message boys, telegraph ones included—proclaimed war by a volley of loud barks. In an instant, Kitty was flying down the grass alley between the espaliers, Harum at her heels, and in another, in spite of her vow, she was sobbing in her mother's arms. For Mrs. Terry, seeing the messenger pass the rectory gate, had hurried after him, and so was at hand to share Kitty's rapturous tears.

'For it didn't seem real while they were at sea,' Kitty presently explained, 'but now that there's only a little bit of England between us!'

"We went through fire and water, but Thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place"—that was the text your father chose to use, my darling, if God brought them back in safety. They will find home rich in love.'

'We'll have to be good to them,' Kitty's sweet face looked very womanly and tender, 'for I've been thinking, mother, Archie will want comforting

too. He seemed to feel it so dreadfully that he—who meant to do everything for Francie—should come out whole and sound—for he soon got over that brain fever, and he says the sea voyage has quite set him up. I do think he'd have preferred to lose both arms—Cynthy would have had him even if he had been a stump!—so that Francie might have escaped.'

'No, no!' Mrs. Terry smiled, while she shook her head softly. 'He has shown himself too truly unselfish all along to grudge Francie his chance, and we will not grudge it either, Kitty, for honour and courage and love and self-sacrifice are not to be bought except at a price.'

Nor are they to be won for ever at a single stroke of the sword, though perhaps it was her gentle, sanguine woman's way to think so. The poorest-spirited can be brave upon occasion, but to be brave all along the line—not to be worsted by the little, the mean, the trivial—no man can so order his life victoriously without first biting the dust in many a defeat and tragedy. But—and God be thanked for it!—the outposts won, every step in advance is made easier; and, his self-respect restored, his heart stirred to its inmost core with the love that ran to him and met him half-way, Francie might yet make good the past and come to a noble and honourable end.

'Motherie,' said Kitty presently, her dimples

showing again, 'do you know you've got no cap on your head?'

Mrs. Terry put up an exploring hand and laughed.

'I believe I *did* leave it on a branch of the crab-apple, in my hurry,' she said. 'You'll have to let me wear strings tied under my chin, if you want those flimsy tulle things you insist on making for your old mother to stay on. Run back for it, dearie, and we'll go and tell Lady Considine our good news.'

But though, with unfailing patience and sweetest courtesy, mother and daughter tried—as they had tried a hundred times before—to reach the sealed chambers in Lady Considine's brain, they entirely failed. Age left her upright and vigorous as ever in body, but it blotted out, though in no unkindly way, all near memories.

'Frank coming?' she said, annoyed to have it suspected that her hearing was less acute than it had been; 'of course I knew he was coming. I told Roberts some days since to have his room dusted and put in order. Frank likes to find everything just as he left it when he went to school. Telegraphed, did you say? And his father gone to meet him? Well-a-day! Things have come to a fine pass when a boy must telegraph to save himself the trouble of a letter! But I am glad James has gone to see his tutor. I always said

James didn't sufficiently appreciate his son. It has always been the girl with him, though she's a dark, sallow little thing, and will never have *my* good looks. I hope Miss Armitage will take pains with her figure. "If she can't have a face, she must at least have a figure," I say. Frank is as straight as a poplar. I shall insist on his going into the army. All *my* men were soldiers. Anne! bring that miniature of my grandfather, the general; Mrs. Terry has never seen it. Frank is like him, I think, though Bruce insisted to my face only yesterday he was the image of his mother! So ridiculous!' So she babbled on; and Mrs. Terry, touched with compassion, could only comfort herself with the thought that her brain would, in some unguessed way, adjust itself to the change when it was forced upon her.

And so it did, for though she recognised Frank and even Archie Colquhoun, she soon ceased to perplex herself about the differences she dimly discerned in them, and was entirely happy in playing the part of an indulgent grandmamma, who, if she sometimes felt it necessary to lecture and scold, in the main showed her womanly partiality for the sex by courting liberties from them she had never permitted to Cynthia.

'All the same,' said Frank, as he sat on the step of the sundial, with Kitty, in her pink plumage, very close to him, 'I never hear her talk to me as

if I were a boy at school still, without wishing in my heart I was, and that I had those wasted years back to live over again. You see, Kitty, when a chap is laid on his back all those weeks as I was, with nothing to do but to look inside himself, he does get a kind of view of his nature that he couldn't get when he's knocking about the world doing his level best to drown conscience. And I can tell you I looked a pretty mean, ugly lot !'

'Hush !' she said passionately, putting up the softest hand and touching the scar that ran from temple to chin.

'One good-conduct stripe !' he said, capturing the little hand.

'Two !' said Kitty, laying her head upon the breast across which an empty sleeve was pinned.

'Two then, if you will ; but it's a long way still to the Sword of Honour ! But I'd deserve that those fiends had slashed me into mincemeat—as they'd have done fast enough if our boys hadn't come up—if I didn't struggle on now, for your sake and my father's. The worst of my wounds never ached as my heart did to see him grown grey, Kitty, and the dumb kind of patience of his face ! It's brighter every day, though I don't deserve it should be, and, please God, it will never cloud again for shame of me ! It doesn't seem much to boast of, my being willing to stay at home, and look after the place—to leave him free for his books—

since I'm useless for any other kind of work ; but knocking about on the other side of the world does teach a man love of home, Kitty, especially when the dearest and best and truest girl is waiting for him there, as you've waited so faithfully, little love.'

'Oh, Frank,' she said softly, 'don't praise me for that! I couldn't have helped it if I would. If you had stayed away fifty years, I must have waited still. And I had Cynthy, dear Cynthy, to teach me courage.'

'Yes,' he said, his hand closing firmly over hers, 'I was coming to that. You think I did a great thing because I stuck by Colquhoun—as if a dog would have forsaken him!—but have you ever thought of all the years, and all the hopes, and all the happiness Cynthy and he surrendered to save me? That we're here to-day and together, that we've years of happiness before us, we owe—and never let us forget it, my Kitty—to the devotion and the patience of those two.'

He pointed down the long, grassy walk to where, with all the summer scents about them, and the serene summer blue above them, Cynthia stood with her lover.

'Sometimes,' he was saying, looking thoughtfully about him, 'I used to feel as if I couldn't stand it another minute. In the night, especially, I used to feel as if I must fling aside everything and rush off to you ; but now, in the light of all that has

happened, and with this to come home to, I think the waiting was worth while.'

'It was well worth while,' said Cynthia, lifting a face to his which the years had made beautiful in nobility of purpose and strength and patience and peace. It had been set of late to grave thoughts, but now the joy must needs break through.

'It looks like nothing, now it is over,' she smiled, 'and grandmamma is right; the house has never been itself since you went away—but the old times are back again now "the boys" have come home!'

THE END

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